

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Will you take your Bibles please and turn to Romans 9. This is the second in our *Attributes of God* series—our first subject was “The Greatness of God.” Our second subject on who God is—“The Sovereignty of God.” It seems almost frustrating, as we study the great doctrine of God in the Bible, to know how in the world we can possibly communicate all this wonderful truth in an organized and effective way that we can understand from week to week. It seems to me that it has to be a daily pursuit. To know God is the highest pursuit of life. To understand Him is to understand ourselves. To understand Him is to know what is happening. Not to understand Him is to remain in confusion and doubt.

The sovereignty of God is a wonderful theme. In Romans chapter 9 it is described in a most powerful way. It is a chapter that causes people a lot of trouble. And I guess if you are looking from man’s point of view, who is arguing for his rights and his ability to do as he pleases, then you will have trouble with this passage. Center your focus on God and the fact that He is not sitting as a passive observer to the events of human history, but rather He is involved, bringing it all to a wonderful and grand climax. From beginning to end, He is God in control. Then you will read it with joy. Then you will read it with understanding. But it is not easy.

We will begin our reading in Romans 9:6.

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac; (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 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." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that

My name may be declared in all the earth.” Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?” 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?” Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 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, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Rom 9:6-24 NKJV)

Now turn to chapter 11. He concludes the argument in verse 11:33 with these words—
And you can really identify with them having just read what you did.

Rom 11:33-36.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.

And all God’s people said—Amen! Let’s pray.

Father, we pray in these few moments, as we approach the critical subject of Your own sovereignty, God, I pray that You would help us to see things from Your point of view. As difficult as they may be to accept or understand, God help us to see them from what You say. There is so much that we don’t understand. You have asked us to walk by faith and not by sight. God, I pray that as we go over the Scripture and examine who You are and what You do, may there be a desire in our hearts to know You. We thank You, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

When I sit at my office to study here at church, there is a cup where I like to have some tea, and I had some this morning. I am holding my cup with the tea in it, looking at it and it is one that I got down at the Laguna Arts Festival. Anyway, Carol and I were down there one day and a guy had hand designed the little cup. And on there were the words, engraved in the cup: I am the potter; you are the clay.

Hey, that is my message! The light comes on. I am the potter; you are the clay. What right—really folks—what right does clay have to say to the potter, “Wait, I don’t like this!”? “Hey buddy, you are clay. Don’t talk. You are not supposed to talk. Clay does not talk.” And you know that goes across the grain of every last one of us here. Talk about a passage that completely attacks and confronts a narcissistic culture where everybody wants to do his own thing—be in charge. Talk about your rights. And you do not want anybody pushing you around.

And God says, “You know what you are? You are just clay. I just mess around with my fingers a little bit and make you into what I want. And I will do what I want to do. And by the way, keep quiet.” And men, we are motor-mouths asking questions. “I don’t like that. What do you mean, God is in charge?” God: “Oh you are acting like it doesn’t matter whatever I do. I don’t like that. Keep quiet.” “What do you mean? I got a right to speak out just like anybody else. We got freedom of speech.” God: “Would you shut your mouth.”

And not a one of us in this audience wants to hear that message from God. When we talk about the sovereignty of God, friends, it is not an easy subject to talk about. And I would like you to see in our message today—which maybe will get you started thinking on this massive subject in the Bible—that involves at least four things.

First of all, it does involve His powerful control of all things. Now all things seem sometimes out of control to me. It looks like things are not being handled well. Yet the Bible teaches His powerful control of all things. And that is based on three things. First: His position. God will tell us over and over again (we will look at it in a moment) that His position is King of the Universe, Sovereign God, throne established in the heavens, He does whatever He wants. His position results in His powerful control of everything. There is no one in a more exalted position. There is no one with a greater perspective to understand what is happening, and to see it, and to know how it is going to take place. So His position alone is a factor as it relates to His control of everything.

Secondly, we will look at His power. The fact is that God’s power is not limited in any way, shape or form. And the Bible teaches that His power is actually working in all the things that are occurring in life.

A third thing that is very much involved in His control over everything is His own pleasure—that God is doing it because He wants to do it. And you do not have any right to question Him in it because you were not around when He started it. God is doing whatever He wants to do and He is doing all of it for His own pleasure. And these things are not what this generation wants to hear. But that is what the Bible teaches—His powerful control of everything.

Turn to Psalm 97, please. Let’s just hustle through a few little Scriptures in the Psalms to see the position of God and what it means in relation to His control of everything. And I really believe that the root of every problem in our life is a misunderstanding or a

misapplication of who God is and what He can do. I think we can prove that. No matter what problem you discuss—marriage, family, personal, job, career, you name it—no matter what problem we would be discussing, the root behind our failure to apply it properly and to take it from the hand of the Lord is our misunderstanding of who God is and what He can do in our lives—and what He, in fact, is doing.

Now in Psalm 97:1, you have an example of the position of God affecting the sovereignty of God. The Lord reigns. Is there any more simple statement than that? Not the Lord did reign and not the Lord is going to reign. “The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad!”

Why?—because somebody (thank God) is in charge. Gorbachev, Bush, Thatcher, are insignificant names to God. They are not reigning. Is everybody understanding me? Now we do our best to appreciate their power and authority, their control to make decisions, move governments, and nations, et cetera. They are not significant to the discussion today at all. God’s position is—the Lord is presently reigning.

Flip to Psalm 99:1-3 please, where it says it again,

The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells
between the cherubim; let the earth be moved! The LORD
is great in Zion, and He is high [there is His position] above
all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome
name—He is holy.

The Lord is reigning and He is high above everyone. The position of God is not affected.

Turn to Psalm 103:19, please. The Bible says, “The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.” Some translations say, “His sovereignty.” His kingdom is ruling over everything. Where is He ruling from? His throne is established in heaven. His perspective sees it all, everything. From past history into future history, all time He sees at any one moment of time. He is in absolute, sovereign control of everything.

Turn to Psalm 113:1-6, please. Look at the opening verses of this chapter, on the sovereignty of God from the standpoint of His position, controlling all things. It says:

Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, Praise
the name of the LORD! Blessed be the name of the LORD
from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of
the sun to its going down the LORD'S name is to be
praised. The LORD is high above all nations, [His position
again] His glory above the heavens. Who is like the LORD
our God, who dwells on high, Who humbles Himself to
behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

I love this statement. This is the sovereign position of God, seeing everything—high above it all. No one is like Him, but He humbles Himself, “to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth?”

What a colossal understanding of the greatness of God and where we fit in. God literally humbles Himself to observe and behold what is done in the heavens, as well as on earth, because He designed it all. He made it all. He has to humble Himself to even care about it. Is that not a phenomenal concept? Again, the root of our problems is a misunderstanding of who God is, or a misapplication of it in our own lives, regarding the position of God.

Turn to the Book of Daniel chapter 4, please. Let me show you some other interesting things as it related to Daniel, who in fact, is in captivity in Babylon. Daniel is a prophet of the Lord, to whom God gave a wonderful message. It deals with future things from our day even. But Daniel got some sovereignty lessons from God concerning the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar, which he was interpreting in Daniel 4:17. It says,

This decision is by the decree of the watchers [which is one of the names for angels in Daniel], and the sentence by the word of the holy ones [another one of their names], in order that the living may know [angels communicated the message to him, and he said, in order that the living may know] that the Most High [No one is higher than He—position again] rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men.

Have you ever, when you voted for somebody that got into power, wondered about them? Amen? Let’s put it another way. The guy you voted for did not get in and the guy that got in proved to be a real stinker or failure or something else. And it caused you to say, “Well, if they would have put my man in there we wouldn’t have this problem.” I just thought it was interesting to read that God sets over it the lowest of men. We want the best person on the job. And when we get the best person we have, God says, “Oh, by the way, you just put in the lowest you got.” “No, no, no. You didn’t hear about his credentials and his past experience, his ability to understand foreign policy and to handle domestic problems.” “No, you just put in a real bummer.”

The sovereignty of God (thank the Lord) does not leave us to ourselves, even though it looks like that from our point of view. God is literally causing it for His purpose. He is even setting people up according to whomever He wills.

The lesson goes on in Daniel 4. Look at verse 25. He is telling what is going to happen to Nebuchadnezzar. He is going to really go bonkers. It says,

They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field [He literally went insane.], and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till

you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,
and gives it to whomever He chooses.

Nebuchadnezzar did what many of the Roman emperors did and that is to proclaim himself as god and “nobody is higher than I am.” And Daniel says, “Well God is going to show you brother. You are going to be crawling. You are going to be eating grass like animals.” And that is exactly what happened to Nebuchadnezzar and God humbles him. And apparently, even Nebuchadnezzar responded at the end of his life to that sovereignty of God. But Daniel says, “You know why God is going to do that? So you will know. God is going to break you. You won’t bring your heart to understand the ways of the Lord, God has His ways. And you will know that the Most High is ruling in the kingdom of men.”

Verse 34 is interesting.

And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: [You could avoid a lot of trouble in your life if you just start this way, honoring the Lord.] for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation.

It is interesting that the most powerful man on the face of the globe, at his generation and time, would make these remarks.

All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?” (Daniel 4:35)

And that is all I hear from people—questioning what God has done. In their hearts they really do not even believe that God did it. But it is like, “Oh, is that what you Christians believe, that God did it? Well, what did He do it for? And why would a god do that? If He is such a good God, why would He let that earthquake happen? Or how about Hurricane Hugo? Why would He leave things in such a mess on planet earth? Why doesn’t He get rid of the wicked people and put the righteous in power? Why does God do it? Why does He let little children suffer? Why do we have a Mongoloid child? Why does God allow deformity? What’s going on here?”

This king, who was humbled by the sovereign God said, “Hey, wait a minute. He does whatever He wants to. Blessed be His name. Just because I don’t understand it, doesn’t make it so.”

Well, I guess you could become fatalistic hearing this. You could say, Well, whatever will be, will be. You know, I love to have people say that to me. And I say, “Finally you said something right.” It is like we are all of a sudden supposed to jump on that and explain it. I just want you to know that whatever has happened so far this morning, has happened. Now am I not a brilliant theologian? I mean, I do not know what has happened to you so far this morning, but whatever has happened has happened. Wow! Is that heavy truth? Hey, wait a minute—come on—the sovereign God is ruling everything!

Now turn to Isaiah 43 please, and let me show you that it is not only His position that is affecting His control of everything, but it is His power. Isaiah 43 is a rather strong statement but I am afraid a lot of us do not read these verses, or at least when we do we skip over it. Isaiah 43:13 says,

Indeed before the day was, I am He [Don't you love that?];
and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand [I love
this statement]; I work, and who will reverse it?

Did you think you could change what God is doing? You cannot change it. You say, “But look what happened.” “Well, whatever happened, happened.” “Well, you are saying that God caused that?” “Well, He does cause all things. The Bible says, He is working and ruling.” “Well, why would He do that to me?” “Oh, the implication is that you deserve better?” “Well, hey, I didn't do anything to deserve what happened to me. I got fired. What are you talking about?” “Well, on a human perspective I guess there must have been something you did.” “Hey, I was the best employee they had.” “Really? Well, I guess God chose the best one to get rid of.” “Well, why would He do that to me after I worked so hard for Him?” “I don't know. But I want you to know that if it happened, it happened.”

Have you ever noticed how, when friends tell you that, it is not really the most thrilling thing you wanted to hear? You know, your heart is longing for some explanation about how wonderful you are. And isn't it terrible what has happened? But you know, you would be at peace and sleep better if you just said, “Well, it happened, brother. That's what happened.”

You know there are a lot of things that happened in my past I do not understand. I want you to know what my friend, John MacArthur, said that delights my heart and makes me laugh every time I hear him say it. He said, “I know I'm right, otherwise I'd change my view.” Now there is something about that I really like. You know, it sounds arrogant, but there is something I really like about that. It is like an honest admission of what we really want to believe, see?

Listen friends, whatever happened, happened. And our problem is in understanding it. And God says, “Well, I know. I also know that you do not know. And I have reasons as to why I haven't let you in on it.” And man, that is frustrating. You know what you have to do? You have to relax and it is so hard when you do not know. You have to just relax and say, “I don't know what happened.”

One of the most refreshing things to hear about somebody is that during a terrible tragedy you say, “Why do you think that all happened to you?” “Hey, I haven’t got the foggiest idea.” You know, that is not immaturity. That is often the fullest expression of maturity that ever could come to a believer, to say I have no idea why it is happening. I just know it did. And I am going to praise the name of the Lord, that He’s got a reason. He’s got a purpose to everything and I am going to praise Him. I know He will work it out for His glory.

Colossians 1:17 says, “In Him all things consist, or hold together.” Talk about control! In Hebrews 1:3 it says, “upholding all things”—not just a few—“upholding all things by the word of His power.” It is God’s power that is behind His control of everything, including the laws of gravity.

Turn to Psalm 115. This is the doctrine that God is controlling everything. The sovereignty of God is based on His position, His power, but also His pleasure. He is doing what He wants to do. “But our God is in heaven; he does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3).

Look at Psalm 135. I have you turning fast today. Psalm 135:5-6 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.” Whatever the Lord is doing He does so because it pleases Him.

In Proverbs 16:4 it says, “The Lord has made all things for Himself, [Listen to this] yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.” Whoa! Talk about the sovereignty of God! The Bible says in Proverbs 16:4, “He has made everything for Himself, including the wicked for the day of doom.” You say, “Oh, God delights then in the punishment of the wicked.” No, according to Ezekiel 18: 23 and 32, God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. But it is a part of His pleasure to say that all people, whether they are wicked or righteous, will in fact experience the consequences of everything the plan of God has outlined—and that is what God wants done. Wow!

Let’s move to a second one quickly. This is a message where your head hurts if you think too much. The sovereignty of God is not only talking about His powerful control of all things, but folks, it is talking about His providential care of all things. Providence means there is a purpose. Providence means somebody is taking care of us even though we do not understand. So we call this the providential care of all things. It involves several things. Turn to Isaiah 55 please. When you say God is caring for everything, He is not just controlling it with a lack of compassion and interest. He has a real care for it and it involves several things. It involves His ways because they are not the way we do things. And Isaiah 55:8-9 makes that very clear. God says,

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways
My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher
than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and
My thoughts than your thoughts.

It is interesting that the verse preceding this was about pardoning. Look at the end of verse 7. “He will have mercy on him and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” The point is that God pardons people that you do not think deserve it. God forgives people who deserve hell. And He all of a sudden cleans up their act, saves them. It is a wonderful thing. God saves them. You say, “That is great, but why did He save him?” “My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts.” You say, “He does not deserve to be forgiven. Do you know how awful he is?” My ways are not your ways and My thoughts are not your thoughts. Romans 11:3 says, “His ways are past finding out.”

Turn back to Genesis 50:19-21. From the series we did in Genesis, we saw a classic statement of the sovereignty of God about His care of all things. It is found in the words of Joseph, who said to his brothers,

Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones. And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Do you know that even in times of disaster God can have a caring purpose that no one sees at the time. He could cause a generation to suffer some pain because of their failure to prepare adequately for a disaster that He knows is coming in the future. But all of those are human explanations. Here is an example where somebody could see easily why God did that. “Hey, you know, I was really treated bad,” Joseph could have said. But instead he said, “You meant it for evil. That is clear. You guys wanted to wipe me off the face of the planet but let me tell you something, God meant all this for good in order to, obviously, preserve many people alive in a serious crisis. A famine has covered our land and covered the land of Canaan. God obviously was fulfilling a purpose here and you guys did not even know. When you decided to throw me into that pit, you did not even know that that is what God was going to do.”

Sometimes we really do see the end of what is “category bad.” We see the end of some tragedy and how God brings good out of it. And that sort of helps our struggling hearts to understand that all things are being worked for His glory. But half the time we do not know. We do not understand. We have not yet heard. And it may even come after our death. I have seen that a lot, by the way. I have seen people not know why something happened in their life. They die and those who lived past them, who were friends of theirs then see after their death, the reason behind God’s plan which they previously did not understand. That is very true also. Not counting the fact that God’s purpose might relate to something entirely different than what we ever thought.

I think of this often as I think of a missionary named Chauncy Sheldon. He has been dead for many years. He worked for forty-one years in an area where he had very little fruit. He was really not an effective speaker—a very average person, to say the least. And he worked with a given man just going over the Bible with him constantly. He was a man who was illiterate and came right out of the jungles of the poorest country on the face of

the planet. And he worked with him and worked with him and worked with him. And people used to question him when he came home about what he was doing. You know, forty-one years and no real fruit. He could not come up with numbers or anything else. And yet that one man that he dealt with, I had the joy of meeting with and ministering with in Africa. That man was turning Africa (at least in the central part) upside down for God. That man became dynamite for God. And it says he owes it all to that one man that came by his village every day and talked to him about the Bible. You see, you do not know but God does. He has providential care in terms of His ways. His ways are not your ways. His thoughts are not your thoughts.

It also affects His wisdom. Turn to Daniel 2:20. So many times in discussions about what God is doing, we act like we know. We do not know. Even some things that are obvious, you may miss the biggies that God has hidden in His own counsel. God has great wisdom as to why He allows the things to happen that do happen in our lives. Daniel 2:20-23,

Daniel answered and said: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and raises up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; he knows what is in the darkness, [when you think no one does] and light dwells with Him. I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of You, for You have made known to us the king's demand.

God's sovereignty changes times and seasons, removing things and putting them down. Empires once existed and He said, “Get rid of that one. That is long enough for them. Put this one up. Send that guy over there. Put that one in power.” And God is exercising His sovereign control of everything, whether we know it or not. And what is behind it? This is the wonderful wisdom of God. God knows exactly what He is doing. But it also involves His actual work.

Turn please to the New Testament for some examples that may warm our hearts in Philippians 1. When you talk about the providential care of God, it involves His ways that seemingly are often different from how we would have thought they should be done. His wisdom is behind His ways. So we cannot figure it out but He knows why He is doing it and why it has to be done that way. And His work is actually involved because He does not stay outside of it and leave it up to us to figure it out. God literally works in the affairs of men. I read in Philippians 1:6, this wonderful word of encouragement to a believer. It says,

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Did God just save you and then leave you alone to work it out? That is not the teaching of the Bible. God not only began a work in us, but He is going to continue to work it out. And I'd kind of like to know that. Isn't that encouraging to know that God is working in your life right now? You say, "Well, all I'm doing is sitting and listening to you. God is working in every life here. No matter what floods your brain. I am not that stupid to know that at times your mind wanders. *What was the score of that game? I didn't put that thing in for lunch. Oh my goodness, I did not get that done. Maybe I should make a note. Things to do list.* One guy said, "You know, I love church. I can get everything down that I need to do this week." I just want you to know something. That God is working in all of us. There is not anything happening in your life that He does not know about. And the wonderful thing to my heart is that He actually cares. He cares about me.

In Philippians 2—just flip over to that. Look what it says in verse 13. You talk about God working in you! Philippians 2:13 says, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." Wow! God is not a passive observer. And I thank God for that. He is working in my life.

Acts 15:18 says, "Known to God from eternity are all His works." He is working. It is not only involving His care of all things, it includes His ways, His wisdom, His actual work. It involves His will, whether we like it or not. Some people have God doing something and hopefully it is not His will to do it. "Well, He did it." "I know, but He probably didn't want to do it."

Folks, let me clear this doctrine up that is troubling a lot of Christians around America. Whatever God does, He wants to do. Did everybody follow that? Theology by David can be both simple and complicated. You can read something—and I just want people to understand it. Whatever God has done He wants to do. And by the way, whatever God wants to do, He does. I cannot believe how many Christians believe that God wants to do something, but will not do it because of reasons He sees in us. I cannot believe that but we believe it. There are a lot of Christians who believe God really wants to do something nice, but cannot. What? Is that your God? Whatever God wants to do He will do. He does not leave anything undone.

You say, "Well, He did not do it for me." "Well, what He wanted to do is not do it for you, at least up to this point." I told you your head would hurt before you go home. I love to think on these things. I tell you, it helps me to walk through this and find out who God is because I am messed up down here, I am trying to struggle with it all, like you are. And I read about God and I say, "What am I so worried about? Enter Jesus. "Don't worry at all." "A little bit?" "Don't take one thought in your little brain about anything that is in the future, for sure. Don't even worry about what you are going to put on, what you are going to eat, what you are going to drink." Don't worry—why? Because your heavenly Father knows all about it and He loves you. He will take care of you. Amen? God will take care of you. He will lead you all the way. Praise the Lord! So just trust Him.

Well, can I be a little concerned? I got it. Hey, I have come up with it, folks. How about prayerful concern? Did you notice that? If I could just spiritualize this a little bit. You

know we are so concerned and God has touched our hearts to pray about this. And in our prayers the anxiety comes out. The prayers are not to worship the living God. The prayers are to express how we are all worried. Wait a minute!

Look at Ephesians 1:11. You talk about the will of God. Is He, in fact, performing His will in the affairs of men in all things? Here is what it says,

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being
predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all
things according to the counsel of His [What? His?] will.

So if you asked me about the sovereignty of God, I speak of His powerful control of everything, based on His position, His power, His pleasure. I look at His providential care of everything and I see His ways, His wisdom, His work, His actual work and the fact that it is His will that is being done.

Number three in the sovereignty of God. Watch it, this is the tough one! Turn back to Romans 9 in your Bible. The sovereignty of God involves His personal choice of the destiny of all peoples. “What? Did I hear what the pastor just said?” You heard right. The sovereignty of God involves the personal choice of God in the destiny of all people—nobody is excluded. There are two issues involved in this, folks: one is God’s right to do it, and the other is God’s reason.

Now in Romans 9, as you know, just glancing through the text, it says in verse 14, “Is there any unrighteousness with God?” Well, of course we do not want to say that. And Moses heard this message from God about God’s own name. God said, “You want to know what I am all about? Well, I have mercy on whomever I want to have mercy and I harden whom I want to. Any other questions?” Wow! Verse 16 concludes: “It is not of him who wills it.” Suppose you say to me, “Well listen, boy, you will it and it will happen.” No it won’t. Whatever happened, you may have gotten in on it by willing it, but that is only because God, in fact, allowed that to occur. Because whatever He was going to do, He was going to do anyway. Did everybody follow that?

You go to a seminar that is success oriented. Amen? Boy, you actually can make it happen! I put my money on the line. I go out of there, “Hey, we’re going to turn the world upside down.” Amen? Maybe there are twenty people in the seminar. Eighteen failed, two guys succeed, and guess what? They are used as testimonies. Is everybody following me? Nobody stops to think, whatever happened, happened. “If I would...” “No, if God would.” Do you understand that the right of God and the reason of God are not looked at much by our generation? We are into our own personal rights, our own personal reasons and we do not want to hear this.

What we have established in Romans 9:20–21 is the right of God. It 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?” [He certainly does.] “Does not the potter have power over the clay, [to do whatever He wants to]?”

How fascinating that he used the word “clay” because as you know, man’s body came from the dust of the ground and to dust we shall return when we die. So He took it and said, “Look, can’t He make, can’t He do whatever He wants to do in anybody’s life?” And if you answer, “I don’t like that, you better be careful. The sovereign God has a right to do whatever He wants to do.

And when you ask me about God’s personal choice, “why this?”—Jonah said in 2:9, “Salvation is of the Lord.” It is the Lord doing this. He saves whom He wants to and knows whom is going to hell. Whether we want to identify with it, He not only knows but it is a part of His plan and His sovereignty.

Proverbs 16:4 says that He does know that the wicked are facing a day of doom and He has a reason in that. Otherwise, why not have everybody be saved? Or to put it another way—why aren’t we all robots? Evidently, God wanted all this to happen for a reason that sometimes is not found in my finite human brain, but it is clearly taught to me in the Bible. I may not agree with what the Bible says and perhaps you think that is your right. I would say that is a dangerous position but it does not make you right. Man questions what is in the Bible. Hey, I understand that, folks. I can understand why a man, who has been given the choices that he has, who has the mind to think that he has, and has the emotions— I can really understand why he might reject what is in the Bible. But hey, do not fool around with my brain or yours, acting like there is something that we are saying this morning that is not in the Bible. Why, we are only scratching the surface. The question is whether we believe it or not because it is definitely in the Bible and a lot of people know it and it frightens them when they read it. You see, when you ask about the personal choice of God and the destiny of all people, you must speak of His right.

Arthur Pink, in his fine volume called *The Sovereignty of God*, says on page 52, “God claims the end [based on Romans 9]. God claims the indisputable right to do what He wills with His own.” Wow!

It is not only His right or His reason. You say to me, “Wait a minute. What’s His reason behind the destiny?” I read in the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:48 that they had some results. And you know what the verse says? “As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” That is what it says. Let me repeat it again. “As *many* as [that tells me something right there] had been *appointed* [I learn something there] to eternal life, believed.” Wow. What is the reason of God? As I analyze that, do you know what that verse says? I mean, regardless of whether I agree with it or not, the verse says that believing is the consequence, not the cause, of God’s decision. “As many as were appointed to eternal life, they believed.” So believing in the message which Paul was experiencing as he and Barnabas were preaching, believing is the *consequence* not the *cause* of God’s decision to save them.

And yet there are thousands—especially in America—there are thousands of us who claim to be Christians, who believe exactly the opposite. They believe that the reason is our faith, but that is not what the Bible says.

I learn also that not all people are destined for salvation, obviously, because it says “as many as.” I learn that all who are ordained or appointed by God will, in fact, believe. That no one can resist His will, which is what it says in Romans 9:19, “For who has resisted His will?” No one has.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the greatest preacher of the last century, called the prince of preachers, was one of the greatest orators. The volumes that man wrote alone in his life are incredible to believe. He preached in the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. The man used to preach in open fields of 25,000 people on Sundays. I mean, folks, we were talking a man who had a tremendous ministry. He sent over 500 preachers out into the world—missionaries from his own college. The guy had a fabulous ministry. Spurgeon wrote regarding Romans 9, these words:

Is it not God who gives the disposition to believe? If men are disposed to have eternal life, does not He in every case, dispose them? Is it wrong for God to give grace? We would answer, of course not. If it be right for Him to give it, is it wrong for Him to purpose to give it? Would you have Him give it by accident? If it is right for God to purpose to give grace today, it was right for Him to purpose it before today. And since He changes not from eternity, before any one of us ever came into existence. (C.H. Spurgeon)

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul said, “Because God from the beginning chose you for salvation.” My friends, God destined and designed and decided the means to accomplish the result that fulfills His original purpose and choice, whether we like it or not.

1 Peter 1:2 says we are elect. We are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

Ephesians 1:4 says we are chosen before the foundation of the world and the purpose is found there. What is the reason of God? Okay, I see His right to do it. What is the reason? The reason is that we will praise the glory of His grace.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 1:26. You talk about the sovereignty of God. It involves His personal choice in the destiny of all people. And my friend, if you are listening to me now and you say in your heart, “Well, we don’t have anything to do with this,” then you did not listen. God designed the means as well as the result to fulfill His original purpose. And the fact is that if God begins to work in your heart, one of the ways He does that according to the gospel is by the preaching of the Word of God. So your arguments are going to pale into insignificance because you made a mistake this morning if you are not a Christian—you showed up to hear me preach. Does everybody follow me? You say, “Well, I was pushed into it. I mean, they’ve been after me a long time.” But you came and whatever happened, happened. I love this.

Whatever happens will happen. Do you understand that you can fight this all day long, but God at least in His infinite wisdom, had somebody hound you to death to get you here to hear this guy scream and yelling at you about how God has a right to do what He wants to do. Are you following me? God ordains the means as well as the end. Whether I preach it or whether a friend or maybe a family member has been praying for you and asking God to save your soul, God knows how to work it, my friends. And that is what makes it all so glorious to those of us who are Christians—how God uses all kinds of things to touch our hearts.

In 1 Corinthians 1:26 it says,

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Why? What is Your reason? Here it is. 1 Corinthians 1:29—“that no flesh should glory in His presence.” That is the answer of God. “That, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord’” (1 Corinthians 1:31).

One last point—just quickly, turn to Revelation 19. When you talk about the sovereignty of God, you are talking about His powerful control of all things. You are talking about His providential care of all things. You are talking about His personal choice in the destiny of all people. But you are also talking about His predicted climax of all history. The fascinating thing about the sovereignty of God, when you think about prophecy—it is already laid out. Everything is going to occur according to the prophetic Word. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth may pass away, but My word will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35). Whatever God has decreed and revealed in His Word is actually going to happen. That is why studying the Book of Revelation is so important to believers and why there is a blessing in there. “Blessed is he who reads it and hears it and heeds it.” That is why that’s said because it is revealing the sovereignty of God even the predicted climax of all history. It causes Christians to rest in the Lord and rejoice in the Lord, because we know how it is coming out. Amen? We know, we are not in doubt. We know what is happening and the world looks like it is in a mess. No sweat, it is going to be settled by God. God is going to straighten it all out. When? We do not know. He told us to wait, but it is going to happen.

And in one bright climactic statement of praise to God, you learn about the sovereignty of God in the predicted climax of all history. In Revelation 19:1-6 as you learn about the collapse of this world’s system, it says,

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.” Again they said, “Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!” And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, “Amen! Alleluia!” Then a voice came from the throne, saying, “Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!” And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, [And here is the sovereignty of God in great, climactic fashion] “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent [what?] reigns!”

We started out in Psalms, the Lord reigns. He is reigning. And all heaven breaks out as God brings it to a great climax. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Why? Because it is true, the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! And one day we will know that like we do not know it now.

Let's close with prayer.

Father, I want to thank You that from beginning to end, You have led us all the way. Lord, You know why You brought people into this meeting right now. You know the reason why some of us got burdened for somebody and talked to them about Jesus. Some of us have been praying for friends and relatives for a long time. You know why people are here, even when we don't, or even when we don't want to be. You are the God who does all things well. Everything has a purpose to it, as You said. And Father, I thank You that You can bring people to Yourself even when we have written them off, even when we said there is no hope and even when we said they are too bad or sinful. You have written no one off. You have the power to do it. And Lord, I know that some are going to spend an eternity in hell. And You have also made it clear to us that men reject You and men refuse and You know why. You hold us accountable for the choices we make, for the decisions we make, and for the means that You have used to communicate Your love to us. And a lot of us are not listening and are not looking and not understanding. We are going about it in our own selfish way. God, we cannot help but believe that You have brought us in this meeting, at this

time, to this message, for a reason that is known in Your counsel and Your will. A reason that maybe would comfort the heart of a Christian who is discouraged and defeated over what life has brought. But it is a message that would also confront those who have filled their lives with so much worry and concern and tension and problems. God, help us to rest in You and Your message that would bring conviction and salvation to those who have been ignoring the God of the universe. Father, I pray that You would bring us to acknowledge Him. You said every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that He is Lord. You have taken care of us. You have guided us. You have led us. And God, I pray that those outside of Your wonderful family would, right now by faith in Jesus Christ, receive Your love message of even Your truth sent to them in this service today. Thank you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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