

# The Sovereignty of God

## Introduction:

Any discussion of God's sovereignty encompasses the following:

- The Foreknowledge of God
- The Counsel of God
- The Will of God
- The Providence of God

## I. The Sovereignty of God

It is without dispute that our God is absolutely sovereign. This is affirmed by both logic and Scripture.

### A. God's Sovereignty is Logical.

"To declare God sovereign is to declare Him God." -A. W. Pink If God were not sovereign, He would be finite — someone else would be master.

### B. God's Sovereignty is Scriptural.

The Bible declares God to be Supreme (I Chronicles 29:12; **Psalm 47:2**) and therefore sovereign (Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 14:24).

### C. God's Sovereignty is Harmonious.

The Sovereignty of God does not transcend or overrule His attributes — it is in consonance with them. This fact is extremely important to keep in mind in order to avoid "Calvinistic-confusion" in matters such as predestination and free will.

The king-pin of the Calvinist philosophy is the Sovereignty of God — the problem being that their concept of sovereignty is faulty.

However, God never ignores His attributes just because He is sovereign. The fact is He is always holy, He is always loving, He is always gracious and merciful. He is always long-suffering, He is always just, He is always immutable, He is always Truth — and, He is always Sovereign.

God exercises His absolute sovereignty in ways consistent with all His attributes. He is never arbitrary in what He does or decrees.

## II. The Foreknowledge of God

One of the most vexing questions in anthological circles deals with the reconciling of God's foreknowledge and His sovereignty.

### A. God's Foreknowledge is Logical.

If God didn't know about something before it happened, He would not be God. The fact is, nothing ever occurs to God — nothing surprises Him!

### B. God's Foreknowledge is Scriptural.

God is omniscient — therefore He knows "the end from the beginning" — Isaiah 46:10; cf. Isaiah 42:9

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This means that every event in time, every thought, word, and deed of man, every sparrow that falls, every soul that is saved — everything — is known of God, and was known to God in eternity past.

The Bible gives several specific examples of God's foreknowledge:

1. He Foreknew the need to send His Son to the cross. — Acts 2:23
2. He Foreknew all who would receive His Son as Savior. — Romans 8:29; I Peter 1:2
3. He Foreknew the history of His chosen people, Israel. — Romans 11:2

### C. God's Foreknowledge is Harmonious.

The fact that God has known everything that has, is, and will take place in time from eternity past does not condition His Sovereignty.

Calvinist philosophy, which argues that since God knew a certain event would take place in time He must of necessity have ordained it to be — or else He could not be sovereign, is erroneous. This rationale, applied to the area of salvation states that since God knew back in eternity past who would be saved, it had to be because He ordained who would be saved. While this 'logic' may make sense to some, the ramifications in the area of sin are startling! i.e. Since God knew back in eternity past that sin would enter into the world, it had to be because He sovereignly ordained it to be so. — This wrong thinking makes God the Author of sin!

### D. God's Foreknowledge and His Eternal Purpose.

The Bible speaks of God's 'eternal purpose'. A study of the relevant Scriptures shows this relates to God's plan of redemption through His Son. By His foreknowledge God knew in eternity past what man would do with his free will, and so determined the great Plan of Salvation.

His eternal purpose is centered in His Son — Ephesians 3:11 — and involves the following:

1. The Provision of Redemption by Christ. — I Peter 1:18-20; Revelation 13:8
2. The Promise of Eternal Life Through Christ. — Titus 1:2
3. The Predestination of Those in Christ. — Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 8:29; II Thessalonians 2:13-14
4. The Purchase of the Church of Christ. — Ephesians 3:3-11
5. The Prospect of the Consummation by Christ. — Isaiah 14:24-27

## III. The Counsel of God

The Counsel of God is an aspect of His attribute of wisdom — we may define it as the expression of His infinite wisdom. The Counsel of God figures into the discussion on the sovereignty of God because in Calvinist thinking it is synonymous with His sovereign decree.

### A. The Counsel of God — Viewed Philosophically.

Based upon Scripture references such as Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:28, Calvinists see the Counsel of God as a foreordaining decree, predetermined in eternity past by a sovereign God.

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The Westminster Shorter Catechism states: “The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.”

Bancroft says: “The counsel of God is that eternal scheme of all things adopted by the Divine mind which embraces all His original designs, including everything in the creative and redemptive program of God, and involving or embracing the free actions of men.”

Thiessens states: “The decrees of God are His eternal purpose or purposes, based on His most wise and holy counsel, whereby He freely and unchangeably, for His own glory, ordained either efficaciously or permissively, all that comes to pass.”

### B. The Counsel of God — Viewed Scripturally.

As always, we must let Scripture divide and interpret Scripture. On this subject, the Word of God reveals some interesting facts:

#### 1. The Counsel of God is the Word of God.

The following scriptures show that we have the counsel of God in our hands:  
Psalm 33:11; 73:24; 107:11; **Jeremiah 23:18**; Micah 4:12; **Acts 20:27**

- a) We have the “Mind of Christ” — I Corinthians 2:16
- b) We have ALL of God’s Counsel — Acts 20:27
- c) We may not Understand it fully — Romans 11:33-34, cf. Isaiah 55:8-9
- d) We can Reject it — Luke 7:30; Proverbs 1:24, 25, 30

#### 2. The Decrees of God are stated in the Word of God.

- a) God’s Decree to provide rain — Job 28:26
- b) God’s Decree concerning the Lord Jesus Christ — Psalm 2:7  
The decree to send His Son into the world to die for the sins of mankind is the only stated predetermined act of God. See: Acts 2:23; 4:28; I Peter 1:20; Luke 22:22
- c) God’s Decree to establish the Heavens — Psalm 148:6
- d) God’s Decree to contain the sea — Proverbs 8:29; Jeremiah 5:22
- e) God’s Decree to deliver Israel — Isaiah 10:22
- f) God’s Decree concerning King Nebuchadnezzar — Daniel 4:24

There are no other decrees of God.

#### 3. Other things are Determined by God

- a) God has Determined certain Prophetic Events. — Daniel 9:24, 26, 27; 11:36
- b) God has Determined the Days of a man. — Job 14:5  
Some interpret this to mean that God has decreed the length of each man’s life. Obviously, God knows how long each man will live. However, since it is possible for a man to “die before his time” (Ecclesiastes 7:17), it appears this reference relates more to the “bounds” set by God in Psalm 90:10.
- c) God has Determined the Boundaries of the Nations. — Acts 17:26; Deuteronomy 32:8  
Obviously, this determination by a sovereign God is not irresistibly enforced. Man has violated these boundaries — albeit to his own sorrow!

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## IV. The Will of God

The expressed Will of God is the same thing as the Counsel of God. God has sovereignly determined to reveal Himself to man and His will is fully expressed through His Word — Deuteronomy 29:29

### A. The Will of God is revealed to man

1. Because it can be known. — Ephesians 5:17; Colossians 1:9; 4:12.
2. Because it can be done.

God would not expect us to actually do His will without telling us what it is. The following Scriptures establish that God's will can be done: Psalm 40:8; 143:10; Matthew 6:10; 7:21; 12:50; Mark 3:35; John 7:17; Hebrews 10:36; I Peter 4:2; I John 2:17.

3. Because it can be proved.

Romans 12:2 How is the mind renewed? How is the will of God proven? Through the knowledge of the Scriptures!

4. Because it is explicitly stated.

I Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18; I Peter 2:15

The Word of God reveals numerous details about the will of God — both to the lost, and to the child of God.

### B. Is there a "Secret" Will of God?

If there is, then no man can be expected to do it.

However, there is no secret will of God whereby He sovereignly determines who will be saved and who will not be saved. This would be impossible because His revealed will clearly is:

1. That all should be saved. — II Peter 3:9; Matthew 18:14; I Timothy 2:4
2. That all who believe on Christ WILL be saved. — John 3:18; cf. Isaiah 45:19

God never wills sin. — Jeremiah 19:5

### C. Is there a "Permissive" Will of God?

Though this term is not found in Scriptures, the concept of a permissive will is. This term is applied to situation where the express will of God (the 'perfect' will of God — Romans 12:2) is not followed, and yet where the Lord apparently permits certain things to proceed anyway:

1. Abraham was permitted to go down to Egypt. — Genesis 12:10

God's perfect will was for Abram to remain in the Land he was specifically called to. Nevertheless, God allowed him to step out of that will and go to Egypt (a picture of the world — Isaiah 31:1). In Egypt, Abram compounded his folly by having his wife lie.

2. Israel was permitted to have a King. — I Samuel 8:4-22

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Clearly, God's perfect will for His chosen people was a Theocracy, (Judges 2:16). However, God permitted them to have a king — something they later regretted (cf. I Samuel 14:52; I Kings 12:1, 4, 11)

3. John Mark was permitted to Return Home. — Acts 13:5, 13  
God's perfect will was for the Gospel to be preached to "every creature", John Mark accompanied Saul and Barnabas on a church-planting venture into Asia-minor. For some reason he quit the team and went home. Evidently the apostle Paul believed he had stepped out of God's will and had weakened the effectiveness of their mission. The issue later became a divisive matter of contention between he and Barnabas — Acts 15:36-40.

This so-called permissive will of God really falls into the category of the Providence of God, because God invariably uses it to accomplish His perfect will anyway.

We note that God used the adverse situation in Egypt to bring Abram back in the center of His perfect will (Genesis 12:20; 13:1, 3).

We understand through the prophetic Word that God will use the throne of David to re-establish Israel under a true Theocracy (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6).

God used the circumstances surrounding John Mark's departure to increase the spears of the Gospel. The sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas (an incident itself normally outside of God's perfect will — Proverbs 13:10; 18:18-19) resulted in two evangelistic teams instead of one taking the Gospel to the lost. As for John Mark, the Lord evidently used this personal failure in his life to produce a trustworthy servant — the writer of the Gospel of Mark and a profitable ally of Paul (II Timothy 4:11).

No one should use the permissive will of God as an excuse for disobedience to the revealed will of God. No matter how acceptable the permissive will of God may be, it will never be as acceptable to God as His perfect will.

From man's perspective — Psalm 106:15

From God's perspective — Numbers 14:18

### D. Is there a Purpose to God's Will?

Some believe God's Ultimate aim is the happiness or the holiness of man. Others think it is the establishment of His rule over all creation. While these aims may be encompassed in what God does, the single purpose of His will is His glory. Everything God does is designed ultimately to His glory — I Chronicles 16:24, 28-29; Psalm 115:1; Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14; Philippians 2:11; I Timothy 1:17; I Peter 4:11; Jude 25.

1. Creation Glorifies God. — Psalm 19:1
2. Israel Glorifies God. — Isaiah 48:11; 49:3; 60:21
3. Salvation Glorifies God. — Romans 9:23; Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14
4. Believers Glorify God. — I Corinthians 6:20; 10:31; Romans 15:6
  - a) By their works — Matthew 5:16
  - b) By their fruit — John 15:8

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- c) By their words — Psalm 50:23; II Corinthians 4:15
  - d) By their sufferings — II Thessalonians 1:10, 12; I Peter 4:14, 16
  - e) By their death — John 21:19
  5. Churches Glorify God. — Ephesians 3:21
  6. The Millennium will Glorify God. — Psalm 86:9
  7. Heaven Glorifies God.
    - a) Its Occupants — Revelation 4:9, 11; 5:12-13
    - b) Its City — Revelation 21:11
- V. The Providence of God
- A. The Providence of God defined.

“Providence” comes from the Greek root, “pronola” which means “to provide.” It is the provision and care God exerts to accomplish His divine purpose. It is God’s bidding, control, direction, overruling, and permission in the affairs of His creation.
  - B. The Basis of God’s Providence.
    1. He is wise. — Therefore we may expect God to act rationally.
    2. He is good. — Therefore He will have the interests of His creatures at Heart.
    3. He is Omnipotent. — Therefore we can be confident He has the ability to accomplish His purposes.
  - C. The Scriptural Proof of God’s Providence
    1. Providence in the Physical Realm. — **Psalm 103:19; 147:16-18**; I Samuel 7:10; **Job 9:5-7; 37:10**; 38:12-35; Acts 14:17
    2. Providence in the Animal Kingdom. — **Job 12:10; Psalm 104:21**, 28, 29; 147:9; Matthew 6:26; 10:29
    3. Providence in the Affairs of the Nations. — **Job 12:23; Psalm 22:28; 66:7; 75:6-7**; Proverbs 21:1; Isaiah 10:5-7; Daniel 4:25; Acts 17:26; **Romans 13:1**
    4. Providence in the Preservation of His Word. — Psalm 12:6-7; Matthew 24:35
    5. Providence over All Individuals
      - a) In Birth and Life — I Samuel 16:1; **Esther 4:14; Psalm 139:16**; Isaiah 45:5; **Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15-16**
      - b) In the Course of Man’s life — **Matthew 10:30** “**But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.**” ; Luke 1:52; **Proverbs 16:1, 33; I Samuel 2:6-8**; Exodus 12:36
      - c) In Needs — **Psalm 4:8**; 5:12; 63:8; 121:3; Romans 8:28; **Philippians 4:19**; Isaiah 64:4
      - d) In Eternal Destiny — **Psalm 73:24; 37:23-24**; 11:6
    6. Providence over the Actions of men
      - a) In General — Exodus 12:36; I Samuel 24:18; Ezra 7:27; Proverbs 19:21; 21:1; Jeremiah 10:23; Philippians 2:13
      - b) Sometimes, God permits Sin — II Samuel 16:10; 24:1; II Thessalonians 2:11-12; II Chronicles 32:31; Psalm 81:12-13; Hosea 4:17; Acts 14:16; Romans 1:24, 26, 28
      - c) Sometimes, God prevents Sin — **Genesis 20:6**; Psalm 19:13; Hosea 2:6
      - d) Always, God Limits Sin — **Job 1:12**; Psalm 124:2-3; I Corinthians 10:13; Revelation 20:2-3
  - D. The Purpose of the Providence of God.

According to Romans 8:28, all things work together for Good. — cf. Psalm 84:11.

Even with the unsaved, God’s providence is for good. — Acts 14:17.

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Providential goodness to the lost has for its end their salvation. — See Romans 2:4

The ultimate end of Providence is the glory of God. Isaiah 48:11.

### E. Theories Opposed by the Providence of God.

#### 1. Naturalism

This view states that everything is governed by the laws of nature, and that man's happiness depends on his cooperating with these laws.

#### 2. Fatalism

The view states that everything is determined by fate. Fatalists may call fate "God," (as does Islam), but such a "god" is arbitrary, non-moral, and impersonal.

#### 3. Pantheism

This view makes man part of "god," thus making God sinful, weak, and corrupt morally.

### F. Difficulties Associated with the Providence of God.

#### 1. Does Providence Deny Human Freedom?

The providential workings of God do not limit God. Sometimes He allows man to do as he pleases; other times He restrains, or prevents man from doing what he desires; always God over-rules in ways to accomplish His glory.

While we will never properly comprehend the ways of God, we know from Scripture that according to His foreknowledge, God achieves His sovereign purpose by whatever of the above methods He chooses.

#### 2. Does Providence Mean I don't have to Pray?

To say this would deny the many Scriptural exhortations to pray. Evidently, there are some things God does only in answer to prayer.

Again, we may not be able to fully understand the ways of God (that's because He is God!) — but we must be guided by Scripture.

For example, it would be foolish to pray for the sun to rise (God's providence takes care of that), but we would certainly need to pray for the sun not to set. — Joshua 10:12-14.

A father will provide many good things for his child, whether the child asks for them or not — but he loves to be asked, and may not give some things until he is asked.