

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA
THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

By
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 1 Chronicles 29:10-20

October 31 is now called Halloween. It has become in our land a day of ghosts and goblins, witches and devilry, of trick or treating. But in Protestantism October 31st since 1517 has been celebrated as the birthday of the Reformation, for it was on that day that Martin Luther posted his ninety-five Latin theses on the subject of indulgences on the door of the castle church at Whittenburg. He chose that day because it was the eve of All Saints Day, November 1st. On that day professors, students and people from all over Germany gathered to the church for feasting and fellowship to remember and honor the saints.

The First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America was held at the Briarwood Presbyterian Church at Birmingham, Alabama December 4-7, 1973. The PCA adopted as its founding principles a firm belief in the inerrancy of scripture, the Reformed faith as set forth in our constitutional documents, which stress the sovereignty of God, and to be obedient to the Great Commission.

On this Reformation Sunday I want to preach a message on the Sovereignty of God.

David defines sovereignty in verses 11-12 - **Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O Lord, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou doest rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone.**

Let me add to what David says a few other scriptures on sovereignty. **The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it... The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever. The plans of His heart from generation to generation... The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake!... He does whatever He pleases. (Psa. 24:1; 33:10,11; 99:1; 115:3.)**

Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian monarch was walking one day on the roof of his palace. As he looked out over Babylon he said: **Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty? While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes.'**

So the great king was given the disease of boanthropy, which is a form of dementia in which a man believes he is an ox. And when his pride had been removed by this illness his reason returned to him

he raised his eyes to heaven and he began blessing and praising the Most High God who lives forever, saying: **For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?'** (Dan. 4:30-35.)

Through His prophet Isaiah God spoke these words: **I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.** (Isa. 46:9-11).

Paul certainly believed in the sovereignty of God. He wrote to Timothy: **He is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; 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.** (1 Tim. 6:15,16.)

There is absolutely nothing in heaven or in earth that is exempt from His sovereign power. None can deflect His counsels or thwart His purposes or resist His will.

In his series on the Providence of God R. C. Sproul made the statement that if there is one single molecule that is outside of the God's control then God is not sovereign. God alone is the supreme Governor over all things. There is nothing that He does not oversee and direct and control. That is what we mean by sovereignty.

God governs through providence. There is no such thing as chance. Chance is nothing. Britannica defines chance *as the unknown or the undefined cause of events not subject to calculation; luck, fortune. An unknown agency, assumed to account for unusual or unexplained events.* Britannica mentions that this unknown agency has at times been deified. In other words, chance can be thought of as something with divine power. But the Bible tells us that the cause behind every event or circumstance is God. Listen to Proverbs 16:33, **The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.**

God actually always providentially directs those occurrences, which we think are merely fortuitous. Jesus said that not even one sparrow will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

We can make the case from scripture that all events, both good and bad, are included in God's governing of the world and all that it contains. Both animate and inanimate matter is included in this all-inclusive government. Indeed, nothing is left to chance or to the will of the creature.

Listen to how the Westminster divines said it: **God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy.**

They go on to say that all things come to pass immutably due to the foreknowledge and decree of God; yet, by the same providence He orders them to fall out according to the nature of second causes; which is to say that God directs every circumstance and event in such a way that His own purpose is accomplished, even though it all seems fortuitous.

Take the account of Joseph beginning in Genesis 37. We learn that Jacob loved Joseph above all his sons because he was the son of his old age by his beloved Rachel. This favoritism caused his brothers to be jealous of him. Then, to make matters worse, God revealed to Joseph through two dreams that he

was going to reign over them and that they would bow down to him. Even his father Jacob had difficulty believing this could actually happen.

The stage is then set for the brothers to get rid of Joseph. They literally hated him. And a day came when his father sent him to check up on the brothers who were pasturing the flock at Shechem. So Joseph set out to find his brothers. But when he got to Shechem his brothers were nowhere to be found. But most fortuitously a man found him who asked him what he was looking for. When he told him he was looking for his brothers the man said that he had heard them say they were going to Dothan. So Joseph set out for Dothan.

As he is some distance away his brothers see him and they plotted how to put him to death. They decided to kill him and throw him into a pit and then say that a wild beast had devoured him. Nice guys, these brothers. But the oldest brother, Reuben, voted against killing him, just throw him into the pit, he said. Reuben thought to himself that he would later rescue him.

When Joseph arrived on the scene they stripped him of his varicolored tunic that his father had made special for him and they threw him into the pit without any water and then sat down to eat a meal. As they were eating their food, of which they gave none to Joseph, they spied a caravan of Ishmaelites approaching with a cargo of aromatic gum, balm and myrrh on their way to Egypt. The brothers then had the bright idea to sell him into slavery to the Ishmaelites, which they did for twenty shekels of silver. They took his many-colored coat and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the coat in the blood to tell their father that he had been killed by a wild beast.

Well, you know the rest of the story. Joseph was bought by an officer in Pharaoh's bodyguard. And Joseph became his personal servant and he made him overseer over his house. But Potiphar's wife lusted after Joseph and tried to seduce him. Joseph resisted and she then falsely accused him of attempting to lie with her and Potiphar had Joseph cast into prison.

But in the prison God caused Joseph to find favor in the eyes of the chief jailer and he put all the prisoners in his charge. It seems that wherever Joseph was put the Lord blessed him, even though he was in lowly circumstances in jail.

Then, in this long chain of circumstances that had placed him in Egypt in prison, lo and behold two of the prisoners who had waited on Pharaoh had dreams in the same night. One was the chief cupbearer and the other was the chief baker. Joseph came upon them the next morning and they were very dejected. So Joseph asked them why they were so downcast. They told him they had had these dreams and there was no one to interpret for them. So Joseph said to them, **"Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please."**

Joseph correctly interpreted the dreams. The cupbearer told his dream first and Joseph interpreted the dream to mean that he would be restored to his former position. When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation to the cupbearer he told him his dream. But in his case the dream was a prediction of his execution.

Well, the cupbearer goes back to Pharaoh's service. Joseph had told him to keep him in mind when it went well with him and to mention him to Pharaoh. But the cupbearer forgot Joseph. That is he forgot him until Pharaoh had a couple of dreams, dreams that disturbed him greatly. He called for all the magicians in Egypt to interpret his dreams but no one could. Then the cupbearer remembered Joseph and related to Pharaoh his own experience in prison. And so Pharaoh sends for Joseph and Joseph interprets his dreams for him. The dreams, as you will recall were about seven years of abundance in Egypt and then seven years of famine. And Joseph went on to advise Pharaoh that what he ought to do was look out for a man discerning and wise and set him over the land of Egypt to store up food in the good years and make that food a reserve food supply for the years of famine to come. Pharaoh liked that idea very much and since Joseph was the man whom God had used to interpret the dreams and then told him what to do, who do you suppose the Pharaoh named to be over his house and over all of Egypt as second in command to himself? Why Joseph, of course.

And in due time his brothers and father and mother all came to Egypt and did bow down to him even as God had foretold they would through Joseph's dreams. All of the myriad details as to how that came about are included in God's providence, so that even the acts of wicked persons all contrive to bring to pass God's purpose. The story ends with Joseph's famous words to his brothers when they were afraid for their lives in Egypt after their father had died, **Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.** (Gen. 50:19,20)

This is just one example in scripture of the secondary causes and contingencies that God employed in His Providential governing. If time permitted we could cite many others, using such notable Biblical personages as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Daniel and many others. We could also cite wicked individuals and nations who are dealt with as God ordains and purposes, for as John Calvin put it: "God uses the agency of the Impious, and inclines their minds to execute His judgments, yet without the least stain of His perfect purity."

The Jews designed to destroy Christ. Pilate and his soldiers complied with their outrageous violence; yet the disciples, in a solemn prayer, confess that all the impious did nothing but what "Thy hand and thy purpose predestined to occur." When Peter preached his famous sermon on the day of Pentecost he said: **Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- this man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.**

This doctrine is vital. When you know that God is sovereign Lord and that all things are working together for good to them that love God and are the called according to His purpose, you can sleep at night. You can trust Him in all circumstances. **The just shall live by faith.** Faith in what? Faith in a sovereign God who is good and holy and righteous in all His ways. We can know that He will always keep His Word and that He Has all the power to keep us to the day of Jesus Christ.

Micah said it so well: **With what shall I come to the Lord and bow myself before the God on high?...He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.** (Micah 6:6, 8)

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