

SOVEREIGN GRACE

by Ron Harvey

When Sonya and I were looking for a church, I went to Google and plugged in “sovereign grace church Memphis.” Not one time did it occur to me to plug in great music program or nice facilities or thriving youth program or basketball gymnasium or whatever else churches offer these days. The only thought in my mind was good doctrine.

When we drove up to the church driveway for the first time, to paraphrase a Bible verse that is about Jesus, there was no form nor comeliness; and when we saw the building there was no beauty that we should desire it. Of course, now that we have come to love this church, the building looks beautiful to us. And, in reality, we weren’t looking for another Bellevue with sprawling grounds and immaculate landscaping. What we were looking for was sound doctrine and I knew that there had to be some substance behind these walls because of your sovereign grace mantra.

Tonight I’d like to discuss with you the concept of sovereign grace:

- So that we really have a good handle on what it means
- So that we can appreciate the importance of the doctrine
- So we can rejoice in the great salvation that it promises.

First of all, I want you to know that the doctrine of sovereign grace is not a fringe doctrine, it is main stream. If it is rejected by many forms of modern religion, this is more a badge of honor than an indictment of the doctrine. Throughout history, organized religion has gone far afield from the Scriptures, to the point that the Scriptures are barely referenced and I must say people in many churches today barely know anything at all about the Scriptures. And yet, they will turn their noses up at true doctrine as though they had some great knowledge about it. You can expect that any doctrine that gives glory to God and takes glory away from man will be rejected by the masses – and sovereign grace gives all the glory to God and none to man.

Secondly, I want you to know that the doctrine of sovereign grace is not a dispensable doctrine. In fact, to paraphrase Charles Spurgeon, sovereign grace is nothing more or less than the gospel itself. It is the way of salvation. It is the truth about man’s depravity. It is the truth about God’s electing love. It is the truth about Christ’s death for his people and the power of the Holy Spirit to effect salvation in sinners and to keep them to the end. To me, to deny these truths is to deny God’s plan of salvation. To reject God’s Word is to reject Christ. To twist the Word of God into some system that is palatable to sinners and acceptable to the standards of worldly philosophy is to twist the life out of the gospel.

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

“Sovereign Grace” means first of all that God is sovereign. He does as He pleases. He does everything that He pleases. And nothing can stop Him from doing as He pleases, ever.

I want to look briefly, but carefully at Ephesians 1:11 so that we can get a feel for divine sovereignty.

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will . . .

Ephesians 1:11

1. This passage and many others teach that God has a will and God has a purpose.

God is not just some ephemeral vapor, without a thought in His head, without any design or purpose. He is volitional being and He has a purpose to be accomplished.

Jesus taught us to pray, *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. . .*@

Even men are not foolish enough to begin a project without a plan. Certainly, the all-wise God has a plan and a purpose that He wishes to accomplish. That=s why God says:

My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure: . . . yea, I have spoken, and I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it.

Isaiah 46:10,11

2. Notice that God=s will is the product of an intellectual counsel among God Himself in eternity past, for He says He works all things after the counsel of His will. His will is the wisest plan that could be devised. It was devised by convening a committee of Three. (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)

There were an infinite number of plans available to God. But, in His infinite wisdom He chose the **best** plan to accomplish His ultimate purpose. There was no compulsion to create the world or to create a human being or to allow for sin or all the tragic consequences that sin has wrought. But God chose to do so, because it was the **best** plan to accomplish his ultimate purpose.

It doesn=t mean that every individual part of the plan of itself is good or without evil. But, it does mean that all the individual parts of the plan achieve that which is good in the end.

Did you know that God promises the same in the lives of His children? Is everything in your life good? Is there sin in your life? Sickness? Sadness? Hardship? Did you know that God has promised that all these things add up to good in your life?

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

3. Furthermore, our passage shows that God works out His plan. He is a working God. Some theorize that God simply spun the world into motion and that He now simply crosses His arms, observes, and lets all things play out as they will. The Scriptures do not support such a theory.

. . . who worketh all things after the counsel of His will.

His power drives the universe to accomplish His plan. The purposes of God cannot be refuted. They will certainly come to pass. What God chose to do, He does.

I am God and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that are not yet done.

(Isaiah 46:9,10)

Jehovah of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.

Isaiah 14:24

- His will cannot be thwarted by seemingly fortuitous events because he controls all things. There are no fortuitous events.
- His will cannot be thwarted by the will of man, nor of angels, nor of Satan himself because He controls them all.
- His will cannot be thwarted by sinners sinning. They merely carry out his decree by their sinning. They think their rebellion refutes God's purpose, but their rebellion only marches the decree forward.

There is not one force in this world, not one creature, not one thought that is outside the control of our Sovereign God. That is the God that we worship. Any god less than that is not the God of the Bible and any church that teaches less than that is not a church for me.

3. Finally, our passage states that His power and his control extends to every detail in this universe.

He works all things after the counsel of His will.

God's eternal purpose will prevail, period.

- Every leaf will fall at its appointed time and in its appointed place.
- The lightning will strike its appointed mark, every time.
- Kings and even presidents are by appointment of the Almighty and his decree marches forward.
- Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall by divine appointment.
- All creatures are born at the appointed time and they die at the appointed time, according to the decree of God.

Let's look at some things that are in God's will and under His control.

- a. What appear to be fortuitous or chance events are in His control.

Prov. 16:33 *The lot is cast into the lap; But the whole disposing thereof is of Jehovah. (70 times in the OT; 7 in the NT)*

Lev. 16:8 Priests used the lot to separate the sacrificial goat from the scapegoat.

I Chron. 24:5 Many temple functions were determined by lot.

Acts 1:24, 26 Judas was replaced by Matthias by the casting of lots.

Job 36:32 *He covereth His hands with the lightning, And giveth it a charge that it strike the mark.*

Example of David and Goliath: Do you think it was David's great skill that sent a stone through Goliath's armor? Or was it God directing the stone?

Acts 17:26: The place of our habitation is determined.

Job 14:5 A man's days are numbered. God has determined the exact date of our death.

- b. Even sinful acts of men are included in the plan of God. (Not approved, but included)

Gen. 50:20 Example of Joseph and his brothers

Mt. 26:21 Example of Judas

Acts 4:27,28 Example of the crucifixion of Christ

- c. Future acts of men are certain to occur because they are decreed and God will bring it to pass.

Daniel 2:28 God made known to King Nebuchadnezzar the future kingdoms of the world and what should occur in the latter days.

John 6:64 Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him. It was certain. Judas acted just as he wanted (free will), but his actions were still certain.

Mt. 20:18,19 Jesus knew He would be condemned to death, that He would be mocked, scourged and crucified by wicked men. (They did just as they wanted (free will), but their actions were still certain.

Mark 14:30 Jesus knew that Peter would deny Him three times.

Rev. 1:1 John was shown things which must shortly come to pass.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY EXTENDS TO THE DISPENSING OF GRACE

So, God is sovereign. But, our website doesn't merely say "a Sovereign Church." It says "a Sovereign Grace Church." That makes it very clear that we believe that God's sovereignty extends even to the salvation of souls. He decides to whom he will extend saving grace and He alone decides.

I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Romans 9:15

- Our God pours out grace to whom He will, and He hardens whom He will.
- Our God chooses whom He will save and He passes over others.
- God determines whose name to write in the Book of Life and He determines whose name to leave out. And whoever is written there shall be saved. Not one will be lost. No circumstance shall prevent such a one from being saved. Not one will be ultimately led astray by the evil one. By God's power, and by His power alone, shall every elect soul be saved, bar none. When God writes a name in the book of life, none can stay His mighty hand. He will do it. He will do it surely. He will do it completely. Salvation is not a work of man, but it is a glorious work of God and not one sheep

shall ever be lost.

Now, that is Sovereign Grace.

Raleigh Springs Baptist Church is hidden away in a little Bartlett neighborhood. Our building doesn't attract the masses. Our music is just the good old hymns. We're too small to even have a nursery right now. We don't have any basketball courts or recreational facilities.

But we do preach and teach the sovereign grace of God and that is of more value than all the rest of it.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN GRACE DOES NOT ELIMINATE MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY, BUT IT DOES EFFECTIVELY CAUSE MAN TO FULFILL HIS RESPONSIBILITY

1. Your responsibility is to repent of your sins.

Did you know that the Bible calls you a liar? (Romans 3:13) And you know you are.

Did you know that being angry with your brother, is the same as violating the command, *Thou shalt not kill?*

Lusting is tantamount to committing adultery.

The Bible says there is none righteous. And we all know its true.

2. It is your responsibility to confess your sins and to have a godly sorrow over it.
3. It is your responsibility is to believe in the saving work of Jesus Christ, to empty your pockets of your own righteousness and to trust only in His.
4. It is your responsibility is to live a godly life.
5. It is your responsibility is to perform good works.
6. It is your responsibility is to endure hardship.

Can you lead such a life? You can, but only by God's Sovereign Grace.