



## FBCD Women's Theology Study

*Do You Believe?* by Paul Tripp - Chapters 7 & 8 (Sovereignty)

December 10, 2023

### THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

"God is the ultimate actor on the stage of the universe, ruling all that he has made.  
God is sovereign; that is, he decrees what will be.  
God is sovereign; he rules what he has made" (Tripp, 131).

**Sovereignty** = supreme power or authority; freedom from external control

God's sovereignty encompasses:

#### 1. His Decrees

- "A decree is a decision or order made by an authority. God's decrees are his eternal plan" (Tripp, 131).

#### 2. His Providence

- "God not only decrees what will be but actively rules over the processes by which it will be" (Tripp, 131).
- In reference to God, providence means "the act of purposefully providing for, or sustaining and governing, the world" (Piper, *Providence*, 30).
- God is not a passive bystander, a passive observer, or a passive predictor of the future. For God to see something is for him to see to it. His perception implies his provision (Piper, Chapter 1).

*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*: "God as Father reigns with **providential care** over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise."

#### **Biblical Windows on the Sovereignty of God:**

1. The liberation of the Israelites from Egypt (Exodus 7-12)
2. Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4-5)
3. Jonah
4. The sparrows (Matthew 10:29-30)
5. The conversion of the Gentiles (Acts 13:13-52)
6. Paul in Athens (Acts 16:16-33)

**Reflection:** Where in the Bible or in your own life do you see the sovereignty of God?

**God's sovereignty:** before creation, in creation, in the history of Israel, in the design and enactment of the New Covenant, over nature, over Satan and demons, over kings and nations, over life and death, over sin, over conversion, over Christian living, over the end times (Piper, *Providence*)

R.C. Sproul: "If God is not sovereign, God is not God. If there is one maverick molecule in the universe, one molecule running loose outside the scope of God's sovereign ordination, then ladies and gentlemen, there is **not the slightest confidence** that you can have that any promise that God has ever made about the future will come to pass."

### **GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

"You cannot make proper sense of your life and your world, of the things you face every day, if you do not include the sovereignty of God in the way you understand what is. ... Think of how different life looks when you really do believe that there is no situation, location, or relationship that you could ever be in that isn't ruled by King Christ. Think of how different your attitude and emotions are when you believe that we are not caught in an endless cycle of history repeating itself, but that we are in a world where God is progressively working out his perfect, preordained plan"  
(Tripp, 142).

Just because things are out of *our* control does not mean they are out of *control*.

Belief in the sovereignty of God should produce:

1. **Humility** in view of God's infinite greatness and of our dependence on him
2. **Joy** at the thought of God's amazing grace to unleash his power and authority for our good
3. **Comfort** in knowing that our world is not a place of impersonal chance and chaos but is under the careful rule of our Father by grace
4. **Confidence** in the wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and immutability of God's purpose
5. **Surrender** of everything we are and have to God
  - "You can say you believe in the sovereignty of God, and have various forms of idolatry shape your marriage, your work, your parenting, your identity, and your spiritual life. ... Belief in the sovereignty of God that doesn't produce willing surrender isn't biblical belief" (Tripp, 147).

Important points to remember about the sovereignty of God:

#### **1. Mystery and confusion will remain.**

- "Some things God has not told us and never will. This means there are things that we will never fully understand. Mysteries will enter our lives and trouble our minds that we will not be able to solve" (Tripp, 147).

- “Ultimately, rest is not in knowing but trusting. Asking yourself why something happened won’t always give you rest, but reminding yourself who is in charge of what happens will” (Tripp, 148).

## **2. God’s control is not always obvious.**

- When we cannot make sense of the world around us, we must focus on what we know to be true in God’s Word about his character and plan.
- Our theology of God’s sovereignty should come from vertical faith, not horizontal observation. We must trust that “God’s self-revelation in his word is infinitely more reliable than [our] ability to observe, interpret, and conclude. ... What God declares about himself is true even in those moments when his sovereign control seems far from obvious” (Tripp, 149-150).

## **3. The “good” (Romans 8:28) that God promises is the good of his rescuing, forgiving, transforming, and delivering grace.**

- “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Romans 8:28-30).

## **4. The sovereignty of God is our hope and encouragement as we pray.**

- We pray to the one who has all power and authority.
- God determines not only the final results but also the means to those final results. One way he has chosen to work out his plans is through our prayers.

## **5. God’s sovereignty does not free us from responsibility for our actions.**

- The Bible is clear that God is sovereign and we are responsible.
- “You can trust the sovereignty of God and also recognize that your decisions still matter” (Jen Wilkin).

“[T]rue and lively thoughts of God will always, happily, and majestically, bump up against his mysterious incomprehensibility. It is that very incomprehensibility, the glorious and magnificent mystery of God’s character, that should motivate the praise and worship of every Christian” (Scott Oliphint).

## **“Hope Not Slain” by Emily Terrell**

Originally posted on March 8, 2023 at *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*

Has a particular Scripture verse ever stopped you in your tracks or caused you to do a double take? I’m not talking about those times when God clearly speaks through his Word to comfort you in a specific season of your life, but when you think you surely can’t be reading a verse correctly and wonder if your Bible possibly has a misprint. The language of the Bible can be shocking.

As I worked through my chronological Bible reading plan recently, it didn’t take long for me to find such striking language. Time stood still as I read Job’s words: “Though he slay me, I will hope in him” (Job 13:15).

Job’s language is staggering for two reasons. First, what kind of God slays his own people? Second, why in the world would anyone continue to hope in a God who slays his own people? Nevertheless, in spite of his suffering, Job remains confident in and committed to God. Though he may be slain, nothing can slay his hope in the God who is sovereign over all.

Although it is Satan who physically afflicts Job with so much pain, it is God who allows it and sets the limits. Job’s intense suffering doesn’t take God by surprise, and he can stop it at any moment if he chooses. It may be a hard concept to wrap our minds around, but Job is right in saying God is the one who slays him.

Job has no knowledge of the conversation between God and Satan in which Satan is given permission to test Job. He doesn’t understand what is happening to him or why he is being tested, but his faith is strong enough to believe that God is in control of it all. Furthermore, he knows that God is still his only hope even when he allows incredibly difficult circumstances in his life. Yet, as astonishing as it may seem, Job’s steadfast hope in the God who slays is not an isolated account in the Bible.

In Genesis 22, Abraham clings to his hope in God’s providence even after he is commanded to slay his own son Isaac—the son of promise for whom he has waited so long. When Isaac asks Abraham where the sacrificial lamb is, Abraham responds in full confidence that God is going to provide the lamb. As Abraham reaches toward the knife to slaughter his son (Gen. 22:10), the angel of the Lord stops him and a sacrificial animal is provided in Isaac’s place. Abraham’s faith in God in the midst of such circumstances is utterly astounding and, according to the writer of Hebrews, Abraham “considered that God was able even to raise [Isaac] from the dead” (Heb. 11:19). Even though God commands the son of promise to be slain, Abraham’s hope in God’s provision remains.

We see a further example in the book of Daniel where three faithful men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—face persecution for worshiping God instead of the king.

They have faith that God will deliver them from the fiery furnace that awaits them, but they also assure the king that their faith in God will stand even if God does not intervene on their behalf. In Daniel 3:17-18, they boldly proclaim: "If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." In other words, even if God allows them to perish in this way, their hope in him will remain steadfast.

In the New Testament, Paul repeatedly speaks of his own afflictions and those of other believers. During a particularly debilitating season, he says, "indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death" (2 Cor. 1:9a). However, he proceeds to offer the reason for his suffering and reveal the foundation of his hope: "[Our affliction] was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again" (2 Cor. 1:9b-10). In spite of his overwhelming affliction, Paul's hope in the mighty deliverer is not slain.

In Jesus's death and resurrection, this theme reaches its climax. On multiple occasions throughout Scripture, Jesus reveals his earthly purpose to be slain for the sins of the world and displays confident hope in his own resurrection (Matt. 16:21; Matt. 17:22-23; John 2:19). In Matthew 17:22-23, he says to his disciples: "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

It was God's plan from the beginning to slay his Son. Jesus may have been "crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men," but he was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). The Son was slain by the Father, but he did not remain slain. As the beloved hymn "In Christ Alone" expresses:

*There in the ground his body lay  
Light of the world by darkness slain  
Then bursting forth in glorious day  
Up from the grave he rose again!*

Jesus was slain for us according to the perfect will of the Father, and he was raised again according to the perfect will of the Father. As a result of his death, we are justified. Thanks to his resurrection, we get to live with him forever and we, too, have a hope that cannot be slain.

Steadfast hope amid trials is only possible with a high view of God's sovereignty. Without the belief that God is in control of all things, hope would be a mere fairy tale.

Charles Spurgeon, in the throes of deep depression, expressed, "It would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think that I have an affliction which God never sent me, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity" (John Piper, *21 Servants of Sovereign Joy*, 761). His high view of God's sovereignty over his affliction was the basis of his hope.

Without confidence in God's total control, there is no hope. If something can take God by surprise, there is no hope. If God is incapable of stopping something, there is no hope. We simply cannot hope in a God who must bow to Satan's desires and actions. Satan may scheme against us and people may do wicked things toward us, but we can still trust that God is sovereign over it all. Everything is in his hands.

Ultimately, we can only have steadfast hope because God—not Satan—is the one who slays. For he is working all things "together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28), and he is "preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17). Therefore, we can boldly say with Job, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him."

Terrell, E. (2023, March 8). Hope Not Slain. *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*.  
<https://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/hope-not-slain>