

Session Three: God's Sovereignty

Reformed Theology and the Sovereignty of God—Living with “rest and less stress” in a 21st century world that markets fear and anxiety.

Overview of Course:

'Flowers, Dead People, and Tending Sheep' or What it means to live out Reformed Theology in the 21st Century by being a Presbyterian, PCA."

The focus of this class looks at the historical and theological underpinnings of what it means to be PCA in the 21st century. We will go back and look at Calvinist and Puritan theology, many times represented as flowers, as a means of explaining our core doctrine. We will explore the writings of "dead men", Calvinist, Reformed, Presbyterian theologians whose wisdom of the past brings us life in the 21st century. And finally we will look at what does it mean to be a Reformed Church as it relates to Biblical church government and being shepherds. The framework of the class will come from the following four books of the series: Basics of the Reformed Faith--(1) What is a true Calvinist? (Ryken), (2) What is Grace? (Lucas), (3) What is Providence (Derek), and (4) What is a Reformed Church (Smallman). Further background from the Presbyterian Primer, Historical Roots of the PCA and Biblical Church Government (Clements) will be used.

Big Questions of the class:

1. What is a Reformed world view? What is a Calvinist mind?
2. How does this knowledge influence us in the 21st century?
3. How do I live out my faith into the workplace and world?

Structure:

1. Look at what Reformed theologians have said in the past as guides for living.
2. How we can live from Scripture.
3. Applications to daily life and big questions of life.
4. Glorify God.

Review from Weeks One and Two:

1. As Reformed believers do we live out life in gratitude vs. life in servitude? "...the true Calvinist has a mind that is centered on God's majesty, a spirit that is sorry for sin, a heart that is full of gratitude for God's grace, and a will that submits to His holy purpose"
2. As Reformed believers living in the conditions spelled out in 2 Peter 1:5-15, how do we live out our life because we claim assurance of salvation?

Today: God's Sovereignty

1 Chronicles 29: 11 Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. [David's prayer before the assembly acknowledges God as Sovereign]

From: G. Aiken Taylor, *What Presbyterians Believe* (from PCA Historical Center, Archives and Manuscripts)

I. SOVEREIGNTY

*As a system of doctrine, all Presbyterian beliefs are determined by a basic thought about God: that He is sovereign in all things. The doctrine of the Sovereignty of God teaches that God governs His creation, His creatures and all their actions. If loyalty to the Bible is the great strength of Presbyterianism, its belief in the Sovereignty of God is its very life. **By this doctrine, Presbyterians mean to say that Who God is provides the key to reality, not who man is. What God does provides the key to human experience, not what man does. And what God works provides the key to Salvation, not what man works.** When we think of faith, we think first of God. When we think of the effects of faith, we think first of God. Even when we think of the ordinary events in the lives of every man, we think first of God. **Presbyterians believe that everything which happens takes place according to the will of God and can be fully understood only in the will of God.** Nothing can come to any man that He does not allow for his own purposes and glory. He overrules the actions of evil men and brings their evil to naught. He works all things after the counsel of His own will and turns all things--even apparent evil--to ultimate good in the lives of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. Man's reason for living is to glorify God by doing His will and to enjoy Him forever in the practice of life's highest privilege which is to serve the sovereign God who created him and gives him breath.*

Q: For the 21st century Presbyterian, Reformed believer, what does it mean to claim God as Sovereign, especially in a world that markets anxiety and stress?

Mary White Rowlandson (c. 1637-1711)

Understanding the Puritan mind, Mary Rowlandson, the wife of a Puritan minister, and her children were captured by the Narragansett, Wampanoag, and Nassaway Indians. After nearly 12 weeks as hostages, the women of Boston raised twenty pounds to secure the release of Mary and her children. Later she would become a best-selling author of the time, with *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowland*.

“... That we must rely on God Himself, and our whole dependence must be upon Him. If trouble from smaller matters begin to arise in me, I have something at hand to check myself with, and say, why am I troubled? It was but the other day that if I had had the world, I would have given it for my freedom, or to have been a servant to a Christian. I have learned to look beyond present and smaller troubles, and to be quieted under them. As Moses said, "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exodus 14:13).

WCF Chapter 3 Of God's Eternal Decree

1. God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass (Ps 33:11, Eph. 1:11, Heb. 6:17) yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin (Ps. 5.4, James 1:13-14, 1 John 1:5) nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established (Acts 2:23, Matt 17:12, Acts 4:27, John 19:11, Prov. 16:33).
2. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions (1 Sam 23:11-12, Matt. 11:21, 23) yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions. (Rom. 9:11, 13, 16, 18)

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

English theologian/evangelist (Calvinist)

Conversion at age 22, through the Scriptures

Preached in England, America, but struggled with community and belonging to a church, so he wrote.

(from Sovereignty of God)

The Sovereignty of God. What do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, ... To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa. 115:3). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is "The Governor among the nations" (Psa. 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the "Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.

Q: Why do you think the 21st century world-view questions the sovereignty of God? Do we “shrink back” with our belief and knowledge and let their questions rule our knowledge of a sovereign God?

1 Timothy 6: 11-16

Shorter Catechism: Question 11

What are God's works of providence?

A: God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

Derek W. H. Thomas

Professor systemic and practical theology at RTS, at 1st Presbyterian, Columbia, S.C.

“...It only requires one errant molecule in the universe to question the certainty of the future and unless we can be assured that *everything* is submissive to God's sovereign rule, there is always the possibility that the future may not be as we have believed it to be.”

Q: Can we choose to live with “rest and less stress” if we live like we believe in God's sovereignty?

R.C. Sproul on Sovereignty of God, Today

For further insight, watch this 7 minute video clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29dYGILI_I8

We say that God is Sovereign... but when it comes to the purposes of salvation we strip God of his sovereignty...”

NEXT WEEK: Providence: Understanding Providence and understanding why those hard questions like “why do bad things happen?” render us speechless when we should speak?