

SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

What comes to your mind when I refer to the "sovereignty of God"?

I have become increasingly suspicious of the way this term has been used in theological conversation.

- I. Biblical usage of the word "sovereignty" in reference to God. NASB
 - A. Old Testament - Heb. word *malku* - "king, kingdom, reign, royalty"

Ps. 103:19 - "the Lord has established His throne in the heavens; and His *sovereignty* rules over all."
Dan. 7:27 - "the *sovereignty*, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him."

 1. Heb. word *malku* is best translated "kingdom" in all cases. Other three usages of *malku* in Dan. 7:27 are thus translated.
 2. Heb. word *adonai* - "Lord" may express concept of sovereignty.
 - B. New Testament - Greek word *dunastes* - "ruler, official" from *dunamis* - "power"

I Tim. 6:15 - "He is the blessed and only *Sovereign*, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." (KJV - Potentate)

 1. Greek word *dunastes* is best translated "ruler" (cf. Lk. 1:52)
 2. Greek word *kurios* - "Lord" may express concept of sovereignty.
 - C. "Sovereignty" is not necessarily a Biblical word, but a theological concept.
 - D. Other Scriptures cited to express concept of sovereignty.

I Chron. 29:11,12 - "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 dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone."
Rev. 19:6 - "the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns."
Rev. 19:16 - "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords."
- II. Defining the concept of "sovereignty."
 - A. English word usage
 1. Etymology - *Oxford Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*.
 - a. Late Latin - *super-anum* - "chief above"
 - b. Middle French - *soverain* - "princely"
 - c. Old English - *souerein* - "supreme, chief, principal"
 - d. The "g" was first added in the 16th century, perhaps to convey idea of "reign"
 2. Dictionary definition - *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.
 - a. supreme power, dominion
 - b. undisputed ascendancy, dominance
 - c. unlimited extent, absolute
 - d. autonomy, independence, absolutely free
 - e. superlative quality, excellent
 - f. unqualified, unmitigated, unconditional

3. Synonyms - *Roget's Thesaurus*.
 - a. supremacy, superiority, ascendancy, all-powerful, all-sufficient, irresistible, overwhelming, authority, jurisdiction, absoluteness, mastery, control, reign, rule.
 4. The word "sovereignty" lacks precise definition in English language. Great diversity of meaning and connotation.
- B. Theological usage
1. The word "sovereignty" became popular in theological usage after John Calvin, French Reformer, 1509-1564. *Institutes of Christian Religion. Sermons. Commentaries*.
 2. Historical background.
 - a. Protestant Reformation a reaction against Roman Catholic emphasis on "works." Man must do this....that...
 - b. Protestants: "It is what God does; not what man does!"
 - c. Protestant theology in general became a theology with its starting point in God's activity; what God *does*
 - (1) As such it became a distorted theology with an inherent fallacy at its foundation.
 - (2) God does what He does, because He **is** who He **is**.
 3. Calvinistic theology refers to "sovereign authority, sovereign power, sovereign control, sovereign causation, sovereign rule, sovereign reign, sovereign plan, sovereign purpose, sovereign will, sovereign decrees, sovereign determinations, sovereign counsel, sovereign fore-ordination, sovereign grace, sovereign love, etc.
 - a. Precise definition is never given.
 - b. The concept is nebulous, ambiguous, inadequately defined.
 - c. This ill-defined concept became cornerstone of Calvinistic theology.

Pink, A.W. - "The doctrine of God's sovereignty lies at the foundation of Christian theology."

Boice, J.M. - "The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is the doctrine that gives means and substance to all other doctrines."

Enns, Paul - "Foundational to the entire system of Calvinism is the doctrine of the sovereignty of God."

Klooster, F.H. - "The confession of the sovereignty of God has become the hallmark of authentic Calvinism."

Berkhof, L. - "Reformed theology stresses the sovereignty of God in virtue of which He has sovereignly determined from all eternity whatsoever will come to pass..."
 - d. Variant perceptions of the concept of "sovereignty" led to diverse theological systems.
 - (1) Covenant theology - "God has *determined* to act in an unchanging, unalterable, uniformitarian way."
 - (2) Dispensational theology - "God has *determined* to keep His promise to a particular racial and national people — the Jews."
 4. Questioning the Calvinistic theological premise.
 - a. The ambiguous, ill-defined concept has allowed a wide variety of divergent interpretations imposed upon Scripture.
 - b. The concept of "sovereignty" has become an idolatrous theological construct.
 - (1) Ex. Pink, A.W. - "The doctrine of God's sovereignty

...is the centre of gravity in the system of Christian truth — the sun around which all lesser orbs are grouped. It is the golden milestone to which every highway of knowledge leads and from which they all radiate. It is the cord upon which all other doctrines are strung like so many pearls, holding them in place and giving them unity. It is the plumbline by which every creed needs to be measured, the balance in which every human dogma must be weighed. It is designed as the sheet-anchor for our souls amid the storms of life. The doctrine of God's sovereignty is a Divine cordial to refresh our spirits. It is designed and adapted to mould the affections of the heart and to give a right direction to conduct. It produces gratitude in prosperity and patience in adversity. It affords comfort for the present and a sense of security respecting the unknown future. It is, and it does all, and much more than we have just said...."

(2) This is a deification of the ideological concept of "sovereignty"

5. Some consequences of the distorted Calvinistic theological premise
 - a. determinism - variations of what God has "determined" and predestined.
 - b. religionism - systems of belief and morality
 - c. authoritarianism - authority of propositional statements and persons who advocate such.
 - d. absolutism - ideology and morality becomes absolute rather than God.
 - e. epistemological emphasis - belief system, ideology
 - f. triumphalism, perfectionism,
 - g. universalism
 - h. fatalism, defeatism
 - i. nomism, theonomy, dominionism, reconstructionism, covenant theology
 - j. activism
 - k. legalism
 - l. sacramentalism
 - m. passivism, acquiescence in sanctification
 - n. lordship controversies - focusing on function and activity of lordship, rather than on who God is as Lord.
 - o. dispensationalism, pre-millennialism
 - p. power theology - God's sovereign power
- C. Legitimate usage of the term "sovereignty"
 1. In light of its ambiguity and lack of definition, and its being freighted with so many variant connotations of theological baggage, it would probably be wise to avoid usage of the term.
 2. If it is used, it is probably best used as a synonym of the Hebrew word *adonai* and the Greek word *kurios*, to refer to God and Jesus Christ as "Lord."
 3. It should not be used in reference to man's state in general
 - a. A king or queen might be referred to as the "sovereign" of a particular nation of peoples.
 - b. Mankind, in general, cannot be said to be "sovereign" or to act in self-determination out of oneself.

4. Adjectival usage should be avoided.
- D. Venturing a definition of "sovereignty"
1. God is "over all" and "above all" - "God is on the top rung of the ladder." (L.M.)
 2. God is absolute, autonomous and independent
 3. God is omnipotent and Almighty
 4. God is the authority who acts out of His inherent perfect character and absolute power. Authority = Gk. *exousia* - "out of being"
 5. God is Lord of Lords and King of Kings - I Tim. 6:15