

*Pastor's Papers* | Ronald H. Gann  
Questions & Answers

### ***How Sovereign Is God?***

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182 Rockingham Road  
Londonderry, NH 03053  
(603) 759-7120 | office@bridgewaychristianchurch.org



www.bridgewaychristianchurch.org

History tells us that absolute power, when left unchecked, tends to corrupt absolutely. For this reason, most Americans are squeamish when it comes to the concept of sovereignty. Ever since the colonial revolt against King George III in 1776 and our secession from Great Britain, monarchical rule is seen as a threat to democracy. It is literally a *foreign* concept to Americans.

The paranoia of absolute power has infected almost every area of our Constitutional Republic—from the Bill of Rights to the Declaration of Independence—and is the underlying reason behind our separation of powers. If the history of our nation tells us anything it's that Americans will go to great lengths, to include establishing three branches of government, to protect the rights of its citizens against the infringement of a sovereign. We cherish our freedom. It is no wonder, then, that in the “land of the *free*” the doctrines of free-will theology have found a happy home among the body politic. Arminianism and Americanism is a match made in heaven, as it were, for a people and a theology that share the same battle cry: “*Liberty* for all!”

In what seems to be a theological overreaction to imperialism, the American church has effectively imposed its democratic ideals onto the theocratic rule of God. That is to say, the concept of God's sovereignty has, in the minds of many Western evangelicals, become increasingly *Americanized*. With an earnest smile on their face and open Bible in hand, many well-intentioned believers admit unequivocally that God is sovereign; that He is “in total control” over all things and that nothing comes to pass under His watch without His ordination or permission. Yet when God's sovereignty is said to reach as far and wide as determining the eternal destinies of men and is no respecter of free agency, these same believers suddenly choke. They insist that such a caricature of sovereignty is totalitarian—anti-American, really—and is beneath the benevolent and impartial character of God.

When the veneer of American evangelicalism is pulled back, a suspicious Theology Proper emerges. A quick survey finds that there is widespread affirmation among evangelicals which states that God rules sovereignly over His creation. This is fine and well enough. But it's not long before we realize that what many Christians attest to on paper they deny in actual practice. When examined at length over their view of divine sovereignty, it becomes apparent that a vast majority hold to an oxymoronic point of view rather than an orthodox one. God is utterly sovereign, they tell us, but when it comes to how His sovereignty interplays with the affairs of men and their free-will, we are then told that “God is sovereign, *with limitations*.” In other words, God rules supremely, but *only insofar as mankind has a vote in the matter*. We are then

expected to believe that, relative to salvation, there is no greater atrocity imaginable that God should enforce His will on man or, in the words of Puritan historian Perry Miller (1905-1963), commit “holy rape of the soul.”

By demanding that man still holds the freedom to command his own destiny, whether temporal or eternal, these believers unwittingly align themselves with Arminianism. Jacobus Arminius, the godfather of free-will theology, said: “The providence of God is *subordinate to creation*; ... it should not impinge against creation, which it would do, were it to inhibit or hinder the use of [man’s] free will” (emphasis added).<sup>1</sup>

Was Arminius right? Are we really expected to believe that the providence and sovereignty of God take a backseat to the whims and will of man? Can God truly be God if, as Arminius contended, some of His attributes are “subordinate” to those of His creatures? Is the Potter really subservient to the will of His clay (Rom. 9:20-21 cf. Isa. 64:8)?

This role reversal (whereby man is said to be the ultimate sovereign in salvation) led the prophet Isaiah to lament: “You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay” (Isa. 29:16). In other words, in his pursuit of freedom, man’s sinful pride turns the decree of salvation on its head by assuming for himself the autonomy and sovereignty that belong to God alone. By way of illustration of the potter and the clay, Isaiah anticipates Jeremiah (cf. 45:9; 64:8 cf. Jer. 18:1-6). Each writer made somewhat different points, yet each argued from this analogy the indisputable sovereignty of God over against the freedom of man.

The words of Isaiah and Jeremiah appear to have fallen on deaf ears today. It is only when the dust settles that we begin to see that God’s sovereignty, in the thinking of many American Christians, plays second fiddle to man’s free-will. Apparently God is not so sovereign after all. Charles Spurgeon saw glimpses of this type of thinking in his own day. He bemoaned:

Men will allow God to be everywhere except upon His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars ... but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth ... for God on His throne is not the God they love. They love Him anywhere better than they do when He sits with His scepter in His hand and His crown upon His head.<sup>2</sup>

Many mainline Christians might be surprised to learn that American evangelicalism has drifted far afield from the Protestant ground on which she was staked. Too many have been lured astray by liberal politics, junk-food theology, or a steady diet of self-help Arminianism. Today the vast majority deem as biblical a form of religion that has been widely condemned as unbiblical by our greatest theologians in the past—namely, the teaching that man has the freedom to save or condemn himself. They convince themselves that free-will theology is the historical norm of the Church. But only the opposite is true. One needs to look only at the birthplace of the Reformation and its proliferation throughout Europe to see that Calvinism has always been the mainstay of historic Christianity, notwithstanding its fall from grace in America.

To most Europeans today who live under monarchial rule—particularly in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Spain—the scandal of sovereignty is not so scandalous. In fact, because imperial sovereignty is, by and large, a celebrated form of government, there is an innate susceptibility among European Christians to embrace Calvinism on a wider scale than exists with their American cousins across the pond. Their rich history of monarchial supremacy has deadened their spiritual nerve endings whereby it is relatively painless to bend to the idea that a lone Ruler in the universe ordains all things and actually orchestrates the outcome of events.

Among evangelicals in Europe, where monarchial rule has a stronghold, Calvinism is the majority view by a considerable margin. In democratic America, however, it goes without saying that Arminianism holds the title belt. Dr. John MacArthur observed:

Whenever I travel around in Europe ... wherever you find evangelicalism, you almost always find Reformed Theology. You come to America and wherever you find evangelicalism, you find Arminianism in one form or another, with few exceptions. And it has to do with [our democratic culture]; we just really have a hard time understanding that somebody is the king, and the king does whatever the king wants to do [regardless of the will of his subjects].<sup>3</sup>

MacArthur does not stand alone in his observation. In his *magnum opus* on Reformed Theology entitled *The Potter's Freedom*, Dr. James White comments:

I believe one of the reasons modern men struggle with some of the plain biblical truths of old is because so few of us any longer have a “king.” Royal power and authority was fundamental when the Scriptures were written, and often the power of God to properly rule over His own creation is likened to the power of a king to rule over his realm. Since most of us do not bow to a king, we see little reason why we should have to bow to God.<sup>4</sup>

The sovereignty of God has historically been a hotbed for controversy. While both the Calvinist and the Arminian declare their allegiance to this divine attribute, at issue in the debate is its scope and to what extent God exercises it. As already noted, many Christians are quick to concede, “Oh yes, I believe in the sovereignty of God.” Yet when pressed on the matter, that is, when forced to determine whether or not God can truly do as He pleases without getting permission from man, we discover that many who in fact confess such a belief in practice deny it. God is not so sovereign, they conclude, that He would predetermine the destinies and choices of His creatures without their say-so. Therefore we must ask the following: Exactly *what* is God’s sovereignty and *how* does He exercise it? Depending on how one answers this question is the difference between whether one is a Calvinist or an Arminian.

Most Arminians define God’s sovereignty in imperial terms, or in reference to His kingship. He is a Ruler, they insist, who governs majestically but always with respect for the freedom of His subjects. The strength of their argument is derived from their strict

reading of the Greek word *dunastes*—translated “sovereign”—which means “a prince, a potentate; a courtier, high officer, [or] royal minister who rules with great authority.”<sup>5</sup>

In keeping within the strictest sense of the Greek definition, these evangelicals further contend that God has absolute power and holds the right to rule supremely as the Monarch of the universe. He has the authority to do whatever He wishes; to decree what is lawful and what is not, to impose His will on others while demanding conformance to that will, and to reward obedience and to punish disobedience. But as it relates to His rule over men, at no time does divine sovereignty go beyond the kingly office and enter the murky grounds of *determinism* (the philosophical doctrine that says all events, including human actions and choices, are fully predetermined by God so that freedom of choice is illusory). Arminianism maintains that God’s *permissive* will allows for human independence and natural events to run their course even if such events are contrary to His wishes and result in evil or spiritual damnation.

Arminians prefer the concept of imperial sovereignty over against the exhaustive sovereignty taught in Calvinism. Their rationale is simple enough: At no time does the imperial view clash with human freedom. Arminian commentator John Phillips often references in his writings the imperial view this way: “Whatever may or may not be said about the sovereignty of God in human salvation, one thing is sure ... Divine omnipotence never violates the sanctity of the [human] will. God does not ravish; he woos. The Lord will neither heal nor save people against their will<sup>6</sup> ... He will invite, but He will not invade<sup>7</sup> ... Nor does he violate our moral accountability by ravishing anyone’s human will.”<sup>8</sup>

Greg Laurie, the influential senior pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California, apparently agrees with Phillips. “You have a free-will,” he once said, addressing the topic of salvation, “and God will not violate it.”<sup>9</sup> Norman Geisler, a much revered professor, theologian, and evangelical scholar, concurs: “God will achieve the greatest number in heaven that He possibly can ... that is actually achievable without violating their free choice.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, Rob Bell, the controversial pastor, writer, and purveyor of post-modernistic theology, wrote: “Although God is powerful and mighty, when it comes to the human heart God has to play by the same rules we do. God has to respect our freedom to choose to the very end, even at the risk of the relationship itself.”<sup>11</sup>

It is a curious oddity that none of these respected Bible teachers can produce a single proof-text from Scripture which supports their assertions. Their theology, presuppositions, and traditions simply *assume* it. To suggest that a sinner’s will is inviolate—so hallowed and untouchable that God would dare not violate it—is to aggrandize the autonomy of fallen man at the expense of God’s sovereign freedom. Moreover, it contradicts Scripture, as we will soon see.

Reformed Theology rejects any view that eclipses God’s ability to act in whatever way that He so chooses—even if it means overturning the self-will of man, violating human cognition, or circumventing man-made plans. God’s right to act is not submissive to the will of man. The world order, political achievement, and human destiny fall under the umbrella of God’s sovereign will. He controls the happenings of nature, He decrees the rise and fall of governments, and He grants the increase or decrease of man’s abilities according to His purpose:

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning (Dan. 2:20-21).

The Calvinist maintains that God's sovereignty is exhaustive—not merely imperial. *All things* are under God's rule and control and *nothing happens* without His direction or permission. His purposes are all-inclusive and never thwarted; nothing takes Him by surprise. He is not merely sovereign *de jure* (in principle), but sovereign *de facto* (in practice). In terms of salvation, the sovereignty of God does not bend the knee to the free agency of His creatures or to random chance of fate. God is the ultimate determinate of *all things*—including a person's eternal destiny.

To the Calvinist, the sovereignty of God is not restricted to just governance. The Lord can, and indeed does on occasion, invade the farthest recesses of the human heart whereby He sovereignly overcomes a person's self-will in accord with His divine purposes. Should God so desire, the Calvinist says, He can invoke His right to induce godly motives in an evil person (in order to bring about good) or to veto the evil intentions of a godly person (so as to prevent a willful act of transgression [cf. Gen. 20:6]). While God does not approve of a person's sinful choices, He does sovereignly grant that they be made (cf. Gen. 50:20). And by granting sin to exist in His creation and accomplishing His divine legislation through it, and in spite of it, He is ultimately glorified as the Holy King who sovereignly controls all things under His footstool.

The Calvinistic definition of sovereignty is utterly comprehensive and goes well beyond the Arminian concept of imperialism—and for good reason. The Bible says so. “For from him and through him and to him are all things,” wrote the apostle Paul. “For in him we live and move and have our being” (Rom. 11:36; Acts 17:28). In other words, all things find their purpose and sustenance in and from God's sovereignty. Certainly no earthly king can claim such right. More than just a prefect, God decrees “the end from the beginning” (Isa. 46:10 cf. Acts 15:18) and ordains the steps of man “before one of them came to be” (Psa. 139:16). He ordains everything in conformance with His good pleasure, including the evil acts of men and the calamities of nature (Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6; Lam. 3:38). Nobody in the universe falls outside His reach and nothing occurs without His sovereign consent. The Westminster Confession of Faith summarizes the Reformed view this way:

God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.<sup>12</sup>

Most evangelicals, regardless of their theological bent, agree in large part with The Westminster Confession of Faith. Yet the preponderance of them rejects uniformly the notion that God “freely, and unchangeably ordain[s] whatsoever comes to pass.” They take issue with this sentence on the grounds that inherent to its meaning is the idea that every event, including human cognition, behavior, decision, and action, is causally determined by God. This is unthinkable to them. To suggest such a thing, says

the Arminian, is to recklessly dismiss human autonomy and to miscast God as a despot. One evangelical expressed his Arminian outrage this way:

The belief that God controls everything that happens to us is one of the devil's biggest inroads into our lives. If this belief is true, then our actions are irrelevant, and our efforts are meaningless. What will be will be.<sup>13</sup>

One cannot help but notice the sacrilege in this statement. To this particular Arminian's way of thinking, God apparently *doesn't* control all things—that is, He's not *that* sovereign—and to suggest otherwise, we're told, is to dance with the devil. But to the Calvinist, such an assertion is absurd; a theological profanity at its ugliest.

Arminians maintain that Calvinists mischaracterize the rule of God by their liberal manipulation of the Koiné Greek. They insist that the Reformed definition of sovereignty is *extra-biblical*, even perverse, and goes beyond the meaning of *dunastes* (i.e. “a prince, a potentate; a courtier, high officer, [or] royal minister”).

Furthermore, when logically fleshed out, Arminians insist that Calvinism's view of exhaustive sovereignty (as opposed to their concept of imperial sovereignty) puts God on the hook for the fall of Adam and for the perpetual existence of evil. *If God ordains everything*, so begins their customary argument, *He would then be responsible for not only all loving-kindness, good will, sunshine, rainfall, and bountiful crop in due season but also for all hatred, ill-intentions, murder, rape, tyranny, and natural disasters that come to pass.*

To suggest, as Calvinists do, that God's sovereignty is so extensive that He ordains the sinful actions of men, including the temper tantrums of Mother Nature, is *anathema* in the canon of Arminianism. God forbid that He should be *that* sovereign! To save God from the bad press found in Calvinistic thought, therefore, most anti-Calvinists have no alternative but to conclude that mankind, by necessity, must possess some provisional sovereignty. In this way the blame for all things unseemly can be conveniently shifted from God to man and, thus, eliminate a theological headache. Andrew Womack, a prominent evangelical and unabashed Arminian, unwittingly highlights the elements of humanism hiding in this type of logic:

[Reformed] teaching on the sovereignty of God puts Jesus in the driver's seat ... On the surface that looks good ... However, the Scriptures paint a picture of *each of us being behind the wheel of our own lives. We are the one doing the driving. ... He doesn't do the driving for us ...* God is sovereign in the sense that He is paramount and supreme. There is no one higher in authority or power, *but that does not mean He exercises His power by controlling everything in our lives* (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup>

Again, we see another Arminian example where God apparently *doesn't* control all things—that is, He's not *that* sovereign. Notice Womack's repeated emphasis on man's self-will as the driving force “behind the wheel of our *own* lives.” He adds, “*We are the one doing the driving [not God]!*” If we read between the lines in Womack's statement we can clearly see the glorification of man and his abilities. This is *humanism*

in its rankest form. In place of God's sovereignty and providence, Womack says, is the reprobate will of man who is supposedly in charge.

The Reformed Christian is quick to object to Womack's man-centered thinking. His version of God's sovereignty, which is emblematic of the Arminian view, is not only limiting but is dangerously close to blasphemy. It displaces the right of sovereign determination, which is reserved for God alone, and puts it into the hands of spiritually dead sinners. Man becomes the chief determinate of his life and God becomes a bystander. Loosely paraphrasing Womack's remarks, God is demoted in rank to a hitchhiker in the vehicle of salvation whereas man sits sovereignly in the pilot's seat, mapping the course and steering as he wills.

While such a view appeals to carnal man, Womack's conclusion outright ignores Jeremiah 10:23: "I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). He also ignores Proverb 16:9: "a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps" (cf. 20:24). Unlike Womack, it seems Jeremiah and Solomon understood clearly who is actually in the driver's seat.

So how does the Calvinist respond to this rival teaching? At the footstool of the Arminian we lay the charge of *theological humanism*—the erroneous belief that holds the human condition in much higher regard than does the Bible. Not only this, but the Arminian is also charged with a second count of a deficient Theology Proper (the study of God's attributes). God is to some extent an impotent Sovereign in Arminianism, or a puppet rather than the Puppet-Master, whose rule is hogtied by the free-will of His subjects. Countless Arminian writers, to include A.W. Tozer (1897-1963) concede as much. In fact, Tozer's words are especially alarming on this point and should give us pause:

God is good toward all who accept His goodness. And for those who reject His goodness, *there's nothing that even the Almighty God can do if He's going to allow man his free will ...* He's given us a little provisional sovereignty out of His absolute sovereignty. He has said, "I'll allow you, within a little framework, to be your own boss and to choose to go to heaven or to hell" ... *There is nothing God can do ...* (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup>

Again, here we see another Arminian example where God apparently *doesn't* control all things—that is, He's not *that* sovereign. But is Tozer correct in his analysis? Are we really supposed to believe that an omnipotent God *can do nothing* in opposition to man's free-will in salvation? Moreover, is God still wholly sovereign if in actual fact He affords His creatures some "provisional sovereignty" by which they become the ultimate determinate of their own salvation? Stated differently: Can God still be all-controlling if, as Tozer suggests, He grants provisional control to His creatures?

By very definition, to relinquish *some* control (to the will of man) does violence to the phrase *all*-controlling. Similar to a woman who is pregnant (and not just *mostly* pregnant), one is either utterly sovereign or not sovereign at all. God either has full control or none whatsoever.

The impotency that these Arminian teachers ascribe to God would be forgettable were it not so heretical. As noted earlier, to Geisler's way of thinking, God will save those whom "He possibly can" (as if anything is *impossible* with God). To Bell, "God has to

play by the same rules we do” (as if God *has* to do anything He doesn’t want to, much less bend to our rulebook). To Phillips and Laurie, “The Lord will neither heal nor save people against their will ... God will not violate it” (as if man’s freedom is more sacred than God’s freedom to act). To Womack, God “doesn’t do the driving for us” (as if God’s sovereignty takes a backseat to anyone or anything). And to Tozer, “there’s nothing that even the Almighty God can do if He’s going to allow man his free will ... there’s nothing God can do” (as if God is incapable of saving those whom He wills). The statements of these men, the majority of whom I respect and read often, leave me breathless with disappointment.

To be fair, Calvinism does not go unscathed either. The Calvinist is often accused by the Arminian of being an unsympathetic fatalist who has embellished God’s sovereignty to such an unhealthy degree that inevitably God stands guilty as the primary source behind sin. Their logic is reasonable: *If Calvinism is correct and God ordains all things, He must therefore ordain that which He hates, such as sin and evil.* (The answer to this question, however, is outside the scope of this essay).

Calvinism is also indicted on the grounds that it allegedly takes excessive liberties with the biblical texts. This is no small accusation. We are charged with inventing word definitions or alien tenses and applying them to select phrases in the Bible which suit our theology. Arminians bite hard on this point. “Nowhere in Scripture,” says Dave Hunt, “do we find Calvinism’s extreme [exhaustive] sovereignty, which allows man no freedom of choice.”<sup>16</sup> To that end, Brian Broderson, the associate pastor to Chuck Smith at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, California and the featured speaker on the Bible teaching program *Back to Basics*, frames the allegation accordingly:

[Calvinists] have redefined certain words, and so they’ve taken the word sovereignty and they’ve given it sort of their own definition—their definition meaning that nothing can possibly happen that isn’t caused by God. And if God doesn’t cause everything to happen then somehow He’s not sovereign. That’s a wrong definition of sovereignty ... So I think the whole debate between free-will and sovereignty is a misguided debate in the first place because it’s based on the wrong definition of sovereignty.<sup>17</sup>

In one respect, I agree with Broderson’s diagnosis but, at the same time, I vehemently object to his conclusions. To be sure, the language barrier is evident between Calvinists and Arminians, as we’ve already noted. And Broderson is correct when he states that a “wrong definition of sovereignty” has muddied the debate. But he is incorrect on whom he places the blame. He offers no biblical evidence to refute Calvinistic sovereignty; only philosophical suppositions in support of his Arminian agenda. In the end, he stops short of letting the totality of Scripture inform his remarks.

For example, as an evangelical, I trust that Broderson believes that God is above all things and before all things; that God knows all things past, present, and future; that God can do all things and accomplish all things in accord with His holy nature; and that God is in control of all things and rules over all things. Yet, strangely, Broderson can’t bring himself to believe that God also *ordains* all things. Somehow this facet of divine sovereignty escapes his theology. To him, God is sovereign over rulers; He is sovereign over nations; He is sovereign over nature; and He is sovereign over suffering. But it’s

unimaginable to Broderson that God is also sovereign over salvation. Such thinking is not only inconsistent but grossly short-changes the power of God (cf. Gen. 4:25; Exod. 4:11; 21:12; Deut. 10:22; 32:39; Prov. 16:33; Psa. 33:9-11; 115:3; 135:3; 139:16; Isa. 45:5-7; 46:10; Eccl. 7:13-17; Lam. 3:37-38; 1 Sam. 2:6-7; Amos 3:6-7; Ruth 4:13; Matt. 5:45; 6:26, 30; 10:29-30; Acts 15:18; 17:26-28; Rom. 11:36; Eph. 1:4; James 4:13-15).

It therefore bears repeating one more time: To the Arminian, God is a heavenly governor whose sovereignty is more or less a kingly kind of sovereignty. Like an earthly monarch, God is a legislator who governs righteously and enforces His edicts as the Chief Law Enforcement Officer of His realm. Yet to the Calvinist, the sovereignty of God transcends mere magisterial governance. While it includes all of the kingly elements germane to imperial sovereignty, Calvinistic (exhaustive) sovereignty also involves the foreordination of all events and actions that transpire in His kingdom and in the lives of His subjects. *All things* are under God's rule and control and *nothing happens* without His direction or permission, including the godly acts of saints and angels or the wicked doings of sinners and demons. In short, God ordains *everything*.

Despite their differences there is in fact common ground between the two sides. Both Calvinism and Arminianism agree that God is the King of the universe and is answerable only to His triune Self. Both theological systems assent to the omnipotence and immutability of the Lord in the affairs of His creation. And both sides take solace in the fact that God commands His realm with supreme authority and benevolence. The main difference, however, is that the consistent Arminian cannot accept that God will act in violation of man's free agency, at least in terms of his salvation, whereas the Calvinist argues that such salvific free-will is illusory; a man-centered falsehood imposed upon Scripture.

But when we turn our searchlight onto Calvinism we do not behold in our line of sight a pristine theology either, at least not at first glance. Arminians have credible arguments against Calvinism that must be dealt with, such as: How does Reformed Theology reconcile a God who ordains all things yet is not responsible for sin? How do Calvinists justify going beyond the Greek definition for the word *sovereignty* in their application of the word? And if Calvinism is true, how then can men be held responsible for their sins if indeed God has foreordained that they should commit them?

These are complex questions, indeed; some of which have already been addressed or, at the very least, touched upon. We have hinted that Calvinism's view of exhaustive sovereignty does indeed go beyond the parameters of the Greek word from which it is translated—*dunastes*—but for good reason: The Bible clearly demands it (Gen. 4:25; Exod. 4:11; 21:12; Deut. 10:22; 32:39; Prov. 16:33; Psa. 33:9-11; 115:3; 135:3; 139:16; Isa. 45:5-7; Eccl. 7:13-17; Lam. 3:37-38; Isa. 46:10; 1 Sam. 2:6-7; Amos 3:6-7; Ruth 4:13; Matt. 5:45; 6:26, 30; 10:29-30; Acts 15:18; 17:26-28; Rom. 11:36; Eph. 1:4; James 4:13-15).

In fact, it's worth noting that many scriptorians are on record arguing that the English words *sovereign* and *sovereignty* do an injustice to what the Bible is really trying to convey concerning God's all-encompassing, all-controlling, and comprehensive power. The word *sovereign* (or *sovereignty*), they say, is inadequate in description *not* because it goes beyond its Greek equivalent (*dunastes*) but rather because it doesn't go *further* beyond, or express *more*, just how powerful and controlling God truly is! In other words, human language—whether it is Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, or English—fails

to capture sufficiently God's omnipotence, control, strength, and providence in a manner that is in keeping with full disclosure. The full weight of this divine attribute escapes our vocabulary. Nevertheless, Bible translators from all eras recognize that, because we are bound by the limitations of language, *sovereign* is the closest English word available to us that even remotely touches upon this inestimable characteristic of God.

As we continue on in our examination of God's exhaustive sovereignty and attempt to address some of the Arminian objections—particularly *How can God ordain all things and yet not be responsible for sin?*—one principle must remain paramount in our assessment: Scripture is our final authority, not human reason. This isn't to say that the scriptural thesis on divine sovereignty is necessarily against reason. It's merely an affirmation that human reason is not always up to snuff in fully grasping the unsearchable ways and means of God. Therefore, in order to jump the final hurdle before us, we will consider God's sovereignty in light of the vast revelation of Scripture. It is to its authority that we must submit our rationalizations—not vice versa.

—Ronald H. Gann

<sup>1</sup> Jacobus Arminius, *Works of James Arminius, Vol. 2*; (Wesleyan Heritage Collection), p. 460

<sup>2</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon; *Divine Sovereignty; A Sermon (No. 77)*; Delivered on 5/4/1856

<sup>3</sup> A Grace Bridge Panel Discussion; September 26, 2001

<sup>4</sup> James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom*; (Calvary Press Publishing, 2009); p. 41

<sup>5</sup> Strong's Number: 1413; [www.studylight.org/isb/view.cgi?number=1413](http://www.studylight.org/isb/view.cgi?number=1413)

<sup>6</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*; (Kregal Publications, 1989); p. 100

<sup>7</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary*; (Kregal Publications, 2004); p. 74

<sup>8</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*; (Kregal Publications, 1989); p. 129

<sup>9</sup> Greg Laurie, *A New Beginning: The Reality of Hell—I; Luke 16*; broadcast date: 1/10/2010

<sup>10</sup> James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom*; (Calvary Press Publishing, 2009); p. 54

<sup>11</sup> Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*; (HarpeOne Publishers, 2011); pp. 103-04

<sup>12</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646); 3:1

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Womack; *The Sovereignty of God*; cited at [www.awmi.net/extra/article/sovereignty\\_god](http://www.awmi.net/extra/article/sovereignty_god)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Andrew Womack; *The Sovereignty of God*

<sup>15</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God*; (Christian Publications, Inc., 1997); pp. 48-49

<sup>16</sup> Dave Hunt & James White, *Debating Calvinism*; (Multnomah Publishers, 2004); p. 48

<sup>17</sup> Audio Recording published at [voiceofthesheep.wordpress.com/2010/02/10/calvinism-is-christianity-without-jesus](http://voiceofthesheep.wordpress.com/2010/02/10/calvinism-is-christianity-without-jesus).