

# The Sovereignty of God

by Mack Tomlinson

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*Mack Tomlinson's sermon explores the sovereignty of God, emphasizing His authority over mercy and creation as revealed in Romans 9.*

**Duration:** 1:09:24

**Scripture:** Romans 9:14

**Topics:** "Mercy and Justice", "Sovereignty Of God"

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## Description

Mack Tomlinson emphasizes the sovereignty of God in his sermon, exploring how God's supreme authority governs all aspects of creation, including the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the selective mercy He extends to individuals. He highlights that God's sovereignty is often misunderstood and resisted by humanity, yet it is essential for understanding God's justice and mercy. Tomlinson urges believers to approach this doctrine with humility and reverence, recognizing that God's ways are beyond human comprehension. He reassures Christians that God's sovereignty provides comfort and assurance in their lives, as every detail is under His control.

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## Transcript

Thanks ought to be expressed to all the Heart Christ staff and the staff and members of Waldo Road Baptist Church for hosting this conference. Thank you so much. All the work that Darren and John and Amanda and others that I can't remember their names right now, all that they do and others do to provide this for us is so, so wonderful.

Thanks be to God. I would like to ask you to turn to the ninth chapter of Romans as we take up this subject of the sovereignty of God. The ninth of Romans.

We will read verses 14 through 23. Romans 9, 14 through 23. The context here, Paul is dealing with Israel's rejection and God's purpose.

Israel's rejection and God's justice. And then he applies it universally. Verse 14.

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not. For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy. I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.

So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, For this very purpose have I raised you up, that I may show my power in you, and that my

name may be declared in all the earth. Therefore he has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills, he hardens.

You will say to me then, Why does he still find fault? For who has resisted his will? But indeed, O you men, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, Why have you made me like this? And here is the crux of the matter. The question in verse 21. Does not the potter have power, that is the right or authority, over the clay, from the same lump, to make one vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? What if God strongly desiring to show his wrath, and make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction? And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared before for glory.

Let's pray. Our Father, every one of our hearts need to hear thy voice. Every one of us desire for you to speak.

For the words thou speakest, they are life. So would you help us in our need, in our weakness. Would you spare us from drowsiness, from distraction.

Holy Spirit, bless thy Word, for the glory and honor of the Lord Jesus Christ is our prayer. Amen. There is a real danger in doing what we're doing this weekend.

In thinking about the attributes of God. It's a danger because God is primarily not to be explained, but primarily to be worshipped and adored and loved. We are called throughout Scripture to an everlasting, as Tozer said, an everlasting preoccupation with God.

But our little minds are a poor container for pure and accurate thoughts of God. We can only think a little bit about one attribute of God. Say for instance, the eternity of God.

That this God is a person, a personal being, who never had a beginning. Who forever in eternity passed, if it passed you want to call it, He dwelt alone and never came into being. When I dwell on that for very long, I just begin to short circuit.

Our minds are such a small container for thoughts about God. In one of his letters to Erasmus, Luther said, your thoughts of God are too human. Well, so are ours.

When it comes especially to viewing God's attributes. And among His attributes, especially His sovereignty. Because there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings and by religious people than the sovereignty of God.

When they really hear what it means. One has said this, men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They'll allow Him to be in His workshop, fashioning worlds and making the stars.

They'll surely allow Him to dispense His gifts and give blessings. They'll allow Him to sustain the earth and rule the ways of the oceans. But when God ascends His throne in relation to man, His creatures then gnash their teeth and turn a deaf ear.

For the enthroned God is not the God they love. The sovereign God who reigns over all. Now when those who truly believe in God's sovereignty deal with His truth, our attitude is of the utmost importance.

It's not a truth you swing like a sword to cut off someone's ear like Peter did in the garden. Or to be argued in heated intellectual debates. It is a doctrine that humbles us.

That puts us in the dust. That makes us worship and adore this God who being sovereign would have mercy upon us. In the beginning, what? God.

There was a time if time it could be called when God dwelt all alone. There was no heaven. Think of it.

There was no heaven where His glory is now particularly manifested. There was no earth to engage His attention. There were no angels even to sing His praise.

There was no universe to be upheld by the word of His power. There was nothing, no one but God from everlasting. Eternally, God was alone.

He was there. Self-satisfied. Self-sufficient.

Self-contained. In need of nothing. Had a universe or angels or men had been necessary to Him at all they would have existed from all eternity.

The self-existent, sovereign God. Now what do we mean by sovereignty? When we talk about the sovereignty of God what are we talking about biblically? We're talking about the exercise of His supremacy. The exercise of His supremacy.

That God does what He wills to do. He always does what He wills to do. Think about this.

The power of God. When the power of God is displayed in the Bible or in history or in revival is the power of God nothing more than the expression of and the manifestation of the sovereign purpose of God. The sovereignty of God is the exercise of God's supremacy.

Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature God is subject to none. Influenced by none. Absolutely independent of everything.

And He does as He pleases. Only as He pleases. Always as He pleases.

And whatever He does He is pleased with. Because whatever He does is good and just and right and wise. And it's perfectly good because He does it.

This sovereign God. He reigns supreme. He reigns alone upon His throne.

And He's Lord all by Himself. But we're living in a day when even the most orthodox at times seem afraid to admit the proper godhood of God. That God is not God in name only but in reality and administration and the outworking of everything.

That God is ruling the entire universe from atoms to all the planetary systems. From the tiniest molecules to the largest mountains. That all nature, all nations and all the affairs of men He's ruling over.

Directing all things. Working all things after the counsel of His own will. Before Him presidents and popes kings and emperors are less than drops in the bucket.

In fact, the Bible says all the nations are less than drops in the bucket. So what does that make individuals to be? God's supremacy over the work of His hands is vividly, is it not, depicted throughout all of Scripture. Think of this.

At His pleasure and according to His will the Red Sea suddenly divides and two walls of water are erected and the Bible says they went across on not damp land but on dry ground, supernaturally. Every drop of water was sucked from that river and it was all in those walls and they went across on dry land. At God's pleasure that happened.

In Numbers 14 the earth opened her mouth and guilty rebels went down alive into the pit. When God so ordered the sun stood still in its course and on another occasion Isaiah 38 tells us that on the dial of Ahaz the sun went back ten degrees. To exemplify His supremacy He made ravens daily carry food to Elijah.

He made iron to swim on top of the water. He made the hungry lions to be tame that Daniel spent the night with. He made blazing fire to not hurt three Hebrew children in the flames of the furnace.

All that God does all that He is designed to do He does. All that He decrees He performs. And there are many Scriptures that state this directly.

Let me just give you some as we begin this thought about God's sovereignty. They are so wonderful and we ought to remember that this is God telling us about Himself in these Scriptures about God's self-revelation to His first Chronicles 29:11 says this Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the majesty for all in the heavens and in the earth is Yours. Thou art exalted as head above all.

Thou reignest over all. There's God's supremacy. Job 4:23 Job said to God in His affliction I know that You can do everything and that no thought of Yours can be hindered.

Or as another translation translates that verse no purpose of Yours can be frustrated or thwarted. Job 12:10 This is such a marvelous Scripture In whose hand is the soul of every living thing and the breath of all mankind. That's a pretty big hand, isn't it? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.

Isaiah 46:10 God says My counsel shall stand I will do all of My pleasure. Daniel 4:35 He does according to His will in the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay His hand. David said in Psalm 115:3 But our God is in the heavens He has done whatsoever He has pleased.

Solomon said it in Proverbs 21 The King's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water He turns it whithersoever He wills it to go. Psalm 135:6 Whatsoever the Lord pleased that did He in heaven and in earth and in the sea and all deep places. When we think about God exercising His supremacy especially when arrogant men exalt themselves at a certain point God says that's it it's all over and He takes no more.

For instance in Daniel chapter 3 and 4 Nebuchadnezzar after he was supernaturally humbled by God his testimony was this that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdoms of men and He gives it to whomsoever He wills. Herod in Acts chapter 12 we remember him exalting himself before the people that day in royal robes arrayed on his throne and the people began to cry out that he must be a God. The Bible says immediately the angel of the Lord smote him and he was eaten up with worms.

Why? Because God is the King of all the earth the Bible tells us. And He rules supremely. Daniel 2 verse 21 says this He changes the times and the seasons He removes kings and He sets up other kings.

Other scriptures that come to mind. Think of these. Amos chapter 3 verse 6 Shall evil befall a city and Jehovah has not done it? Now we won't get on CNN tonight and get asked about that scripture I promise

you that.

Shall evil befall a city and has not Jehovah has He not done it? Habakkuk 1 verse 6 God says this For lo, I raise up the Chaldeans that bitter and hasty nation that marches through the breadth of the earth to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. God says I raise them up as instruments of judgment to work His purposes in the earth. The absolute supremacy of God is affirmed equally in the New Testament from a single bird or not two sparrows sold for a penny and yet not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father.

From a single bird all the way to the very death of the Son of God for of a truth in this city it says in Acts Luke writes under inspiration Both the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel predestinated to come to pass. In John 19.11 the Lord Jesus said to Pilate There would have that you would have no power against me except it were given to you from above. Now, think about this and let it sink deeply into our hearts.

Think of all that God rules over. For instance, He rules over all nature and all weather. Jeremiah chapter 10 Jeremiah said He makes lightning for the rain and brings out the wind from His storehouses.

Nahum 1.3 Jehovah does His will in the whirlwind and in the storm. The hymn says it There's not a plant or flower below but makes thy glories known and clouds arise and tempests blow by orders from thy throne. God rules over all nature and all weather.

This is why Jonathan Edwards loved to walk during lightning storms. I don't like to do that yet. But he did.

Because he knew that God ruled over nature and over all the earth. God rules over kings and nations. Read Daniel 2 especially on that one.

God rules over people and their hearts. Remember Genesis 20 In Genesis 20 Abraham met Abimelech the king of Gerah and Abimelech had taken Sarah for his harem. Remember that? But before he came near her God warned him in a dream She is a man's wife.

And then God said But I withheld you from sinning against me therefore I didn't let you touch her. God rules over the hearts of people when they know it and when they don't. He's in control.

Shemai in 2 Samuel 16 cursed David on the street. Remember? When David was coming in Shemai goes along cursing him. And David's men want to take him out and David says Let him alone and let him curse me for so has the Lord ordered it.

How about that one? He rules over the closing and opening of the womb. In 1 Samuel 1 speaking of Elkanah the Bible says To Hannah he gave a double portion for he loved Hannah although the Lord had closed her womb. God rules over destructive animals.

2 Kings 17 The Bible says Therefore the Lord sent lions among them which killed some of them. Now there are many scriptures that talk about God commanding birds and bears and donkeys and large fish to do his bidding. God rules over all of it.

He rules over man's evil and everything man calls evil. God governs it and he rules over it. Genesis 50 verse 20 Joseph said this You meant it for evil but God purposed it meant it for good to bring to pass the saving of many people.

God rules over life and death. Deuteronomy 32 He says See to it now that I even I am he and there is no God but me I kill and I make alive and there is no one who can deliver out of my hand. Our God reigns supreme in his will.

The Bible makes it obvious and how it's amazing to think that how a regenerate mind could not read the Bible honestly with a teachable heart and see it that God really is sovereign and controlling all things but perhaps perhaps the most glaring revelation of God's supreme sovereignty in the Bible very well may be Romans 9 where we read and let's look back there as we think about this in the life of a particular ruler of a mighty land the land of Egypt his name was Pharaoh or perhaps we should say his position was that of Pharaoh over the land of Egypt and as we go to the ninth of Romans to take a look at the life and experience of this one man we realize that he is truly a representative of an individual and of a ruler this entire story of Pharaoh was found in Exodus 5 through Exodus 14

and Paul takes up the subject and the example of Pharaoh in Romans 9 to speak about God's attribute of absolute independent sovereignty now Romans 9 has been made difficult by men God has not made it difficult you don't need to know Greek to understand the message of it and believe it and rejoice in it it's difficult not because it's complex but because it is strongly offensive to the natural man and to the religious mind but because a thing is difficult or seems difficult or is offensive doesn't mean we can change it or avoid it Paul the apostle never does that with truths in scripture he takes it on he faces the issue he examines it he gives his answer to it we must not avoid these difficult or offensive areas of truth rather God who is sovereign who is our Father who has given us the

Holy Spirit wants to lead us into all these truths and causes us to understand them and rejoice in them and apply them in our lives what should our attitude be as we approach a passage like Romans 9 humility reverence teachableness as Martin Lloyd Jones said when you approach this chapter take your shoes off your feet and isn't that what Paul does at the end of this section in Romans 11 at the end of chapter 11 he does that he says oh the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways are past finding out take our shoes off when we think about these things Romans 9 God's ways and his purpose with Pharaoh we're going to concentrate on verses 15 through 21 Paul is teaching some major theology in this chapter to show us God in

fact isn't that what the whole Bible is God in the whole Bible is showing us himself and here in Romans 9 he is showing us his sovereignty let's remind ourselves of the high points of Paul's teaching here we read it go back to verse 15 and we're going to look down through the passage over the next few moments but I want to emphasize the major truths that Paul gives us here first truth first truth God is not merciful to all God is not merciful to all verse 15 and 16 for he says to Moses I will have mercy on whomever I want to have mercy upon and I will have compassion on whomever I want to have compassion upon so then it is not of him who wills nor of him who runs but of God who chooses to show mercy God is not merciful to all now in verse 15 Paul is quoting Exodus 33 verse 19 where God

said this to Moses on the mount God said to Moses directly in Exodus I will have mercy on whom I choose to have mercy upon and I will have compassion I will extend my compassion to those I choose to give my compassion to God said that directly to Moses and the same thought continues here verse 18 therefore he has mercy on whom he wills and verse 21 has not the potter authority over the clay to make a vessel unto honor a vessel of mercy God does not choose to have mercy upon everyone could he could God save everyone in New York City this afternoon no problem no problem no sweat on the brow no effort God could do that but the fact of the matter is Paul is saying in Romans 9 that God does not choose to have

mercy on everyone it's only upon some it is faulty belief to think that God has to

have mercy to all or to anyone simply because he's shown mercy to some he doesn't we must think clearly about God's attributes at this point God is always wise God is always holy and powerful and true but here in Romans 9 God is telling us that he is not always in every situation he's not always merciful that is he often times shows mercy to some but not to others he is by nature gracious and loving in his essence and in his being but he is sovereignly free to extend that mercy to whom he chooses to and we must recognize that I will have mercy on whom I choose to have mercy to the sovereignty of God's mercy now the first sermon our Lord Jesus Christ preached after his anointing his baptism his baptism of the spirit at Jordan his going into the wilderness to be tempted he came out of the

wilderness in the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit he went to Nazareth and he preached the first time Isaiah 61 was fulfilled you know what he declared there in that first sermon the sovereignty of God's free mercy he said there in Luke 4 there were many widows in Elijah's day but Elijah was sent to none of them except one in Zarephath and there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha but none of them were cleansed except Naaman the Syrian you know what the Bible says in the next verse when they heard that they were filled with anger and rose up and put him out of the city you know Jesus is not the only preacher who has ever been put out of a place for preaching divine sovereignty but he did at the beginning of his ministry God chose to have mercy upon one widow and one

leper in those situations he does not extend mercy to all but only to some now that's a major truth Paul is telling us when we want to understand God's sovereignty we must view him that way if we want a right perspective and a right theology about this God that we worship and that we love he does not show mercy to all second major truth Paul gives us here in verse 17 and it's this God raised up Pharaoh sovereignly God raised up the man Pharaoh sovereignly verse 17 God says to Pharaoh and how did God say it to Pharaoh through the mouth of Moses Moses stood before Pharaoh and out of his mouth came these words God said to Pharaoh for this purpose have I raised you up this phrase I have raised you up is an amazing phrase it's not the idea of creation though we know God created him it's not

the idea of God creating Pharaoh or especially creating him for evil or that God made him evil that's not what it's saying it's the idea that God took this lump of clay that was a part of all the fallen sons of Adam all the fallen clay of Adam God took this one piece of fallen clay and that God directed him and caused him to appear in this position and to be brought forward onto the stage of human events right at this particular moment Charles Hodge translated it this way for this purpose I have raised you up and placed you where you are instead of cutting you off quickly God raised up this man Pharaoh for his purposes it's the idea that God was dealing with a fallen man who's already wicked and evil fully intent on his own course and God takes this lump of clay this pot sherd named

Pharaoh and placed him at that point in history to use him to fulfill God's purpose for this purpose God told him I have raised you up has not the potter power over the clay that's the question so the second major truth that just ought to be clear to us is that God sovereignly raised Pharaoh up, go back and read again with freshness and wonder Exodus 5-14 and it's astounding how God sovereignly engineers and controls all things right down to the fact that when they came out of that land all those millions not a single dog barked and opened its mouth God was in such control of the whole event truth number three God hardened Pharaoh's heart verse 17-23 so then he has mercy on whom he will and whom he wills he hardens can God do that with a person it is the hardening that's the offensive

thing isn't it is this difficult for you this afternoon do you shy away and say in your heart I don't like that I can't understand it and I don't like to think about it I just want to leave that stuff in the bible alone that dear friend is spiritually fatal it's dishonoring to God who has revealed the truth because you're saying that there are parts of God's word and some truths that you don't care about knowing let's face these things we're not dealing with man's opinion or even Paul's opinion, it is God himself who has said to us that this is what he does at times for his own purposes this word hardens it means to render one stubborn, who's already stubborn to cause one to progress in their resistance and in their stubbornness whom he wills he hardens now remember God didn't create

Pharaoh evil or make him wicked it's the idea that God was dealing with a fallen lump of creation who is already wicked, so God for his purposes chooses to actively render Pharaoh more obstinate, more stubborn and causes him to be stubborn in refusing to let Israel go God did that God so worked upon and with Pharaoh to actively progress his hardness to bring about divine ends and divine purposes but here's where a difficulty comes in the Bible says in Exodus 8 that Pharaoh hardened his own heart says it twice verse 15 Pharaoh hardened his heart verse 32 Pharaoh hardened his heart how do we understand this ask Charles Leiter at supper ask Paul tonight at the Q&A well some say well God God didn't really harden him God simply backed off and allowed him to become what he naturally would have

been well there's a little problem with that because the words used in Romans 9 and in Exodus are words that are active not passive or permissive it does not say that God allowed Pharaoh to harden his heart simply permitting him to be what he would have been naturally but that God actively progressed and worked on his heart to cause him to be more stubborn it's clear that God rendered Pharaoh more stubborn and obstinate and caused him to continue in his hardening it's almost funny after the Exodus and all the plagues have destroyed Egypt and all the first born are dead and they're out of the country wouldn't you think the whole nation would just dance and shout for joy and say man they're finally gone but what does Pharaoh do suddenly he says what is this thing that I've done I mean it's

like well duh you've only gotten rid of your worst nightmare of all these weeks what do you mean what have you done and Pharaoh then his heart was turned to pursue him God was actively controlling him it's clear that God did it in Exodus and in Romans the scripture specifically puts the cause as God himself for the hardening now also another proof of that is that God already told Moses beforehand that he was going to do this Exodus 4 21 God says to Moses but I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he won't let you go God announces to Moses here's my plan here's my MO I'm going to harden his heart and he's not going to let you go Exodus 14 verse 4 same thing I will harden Pharaoh's heart that he will follow after them fulfillment of it verse 8 and God hardened Pharaoh's heart and he pursued

after the children of Israel so question did Pharaoh harden his own heart yes did God harden Pharaoh's heart yes both are equally true we don't have to reconcile them let them stand it's true rejoice in it believe it God hardened the heart of Pharaoh Pharaoh hardened the heart of Pharaoh God ordained and purpose that Pharaoh would be there at this point of history in order that through him God's attributes of justice and righteousness and great mercy would display to all the earth through the redemption of his people and the judgment of the Egyptians God got glory for himself upon Pharaoh now you find the same thing in other scriptures this thing of God hardening men at times for God's purposes Psalm 105 verse 25 for instance he turned their hearts meaning the Egyptians he turned their

hearts to hate his people and deal severely with them God is not like you and me folks we wouldn't do that to people would you turn the hearts of the wicked in the Middle East to hate Americans and act severely

toward us you wouldn't do that you we pray against it and yet God at times does that Romans 11 verse 8 Paul said God has given them a spirit of slumber and stupor eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear God does this at times with individuals 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 Paul speaking of those who would not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved Paul says this for this reason God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie thus Paul teaches us here whom he wills he hardens truth number 4 God's purpose in hardening Pharaoh's heart God's

purpose God had a purpose he always does God's purpose in hardening Pharaoh's heart was to display his own power and his own glory that was his purpose verse 17 for this very purpose have I raised you up that I might show my power in you so that my name might be declared in all the earth now there he's quoting Exodus 9 verse 16 again and God says for this purpose have I raised you up that I might make my glory seen and known and displayed Exodus 14 again God tells Moses I'm going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will pursue them and I will gain honor upon Pharaoh and over all his army that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord Romans 9 verse 22 says the same thing what if God strongly desiring to show and reveal his wrath and make his power known that's his divine purpose in

sovereignly dealing with people it's not unclear it's not complex it's clearly revealed here God hardened Pharaoh in order to display his power and his glory in the redemption of his people God extends at times hardening or he extends mercy and grace for his own glorious purpose and it's not about man it's about his fulfilling his purpose in all of history such as God's sovereignty with Pharaoh now let's summarize this think back through it number one God Paul tells us does not have mercy on all and it was God that raised up Pharaoh and put him where he was to be who he was for God's purpose then God to display his justice and his glory God rendered Pharaoh more stubborn and more stubborn so that he would not let the people go and God did that for the purpose of displaying his power that

Romans 9 passage is a clear display of the absolute sovereignty of God he has mercy on whom he wills and whom he wills he hardens now God works through history to show his attributes doesn't he he has always done because God is holy his anger burns against sin because he's righteous his judgments fall on the earth and upon those who rebel against him because he's faithful the solemn threatenings and promises of his word are always fulfilled always because he's omnipotent none can successfully resist him because he's omniscient no problem can even challenge his wisdom in any way and because he's sovereign he exercises his supremacy now when understood does this truth does it not produce a response in people's hearts usually one of two things I love it or I hate that it's usually one of two

those always arise up as philosophers and judges and say either with their words or at least in their hearts that isn't right it's not fair this is wrong if what is really being said if I understood if I heard you right if that's what it means no one can stand against God finally what right does then he have to punish anyone what right does God have to harden someone's heart or to send someone to hell God is unjust and unfair well we know that Paul takes this up here in this passage doesn't he in 19 through 21 how does he do it he does it by quoting Isaiah 45 verse 9 woe to him who strives with his maker shall the thing formed say to him who fashioned it what are you doing so Paul directly quotes Isaiah 45 9 now he may have in mind also though he doesn't quote it Isaiah 64 verse 8 wear

the clay you are the potter or he may even have Jeremiah 18 turn there with me this is worth reading Jeremiah 18 is such a perfect illustration of Paul's teaching here Jeremiah chapter 18 verse 1 through 6 the word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying arise go down to the potter's house and there I will cause you to hear my words then I went down to the potter's house and there he was making something at

the wheel what was he working with clay at the wheel working making something at the wheel and the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter folks that's all of creation all of creation and all of us from Adam are marred clay that's all we are we are marred clay and here is this picture God gives through Jeremiah of the marred clay on the potter's wheel and

it says so he made it again into another vessel what as seemed good to the potter to make verse 5 then the word of the Lord came to me saying here's what God said to Jeremiah here's Jeremiah what I want you to hear in seeing this sermon illustration I just gave you verse 6 O house of Israel can I not do with you as this potter look as the clay is in the hands of the potter so are you in my hand O house of Israel shall the thing formed say to the one who formed it why are you doing it this way why have you made me this way why did you do those things you have no right to do what you're doing this phrase Paul uses the thing formed it's an interesting word literally it's the word plasma where we get the word plastic something molded and God is saying to those who rise up to resist and argue

you are only a piece of creation that's all you are man challenging God a creature criticizing the creator a thing formed finding fault with the one who formed it the clay giving advice to the potter God says oh man who are you remember if our hearts rise up with humanistic thinking and we want to say we're tempted to feel it's not right for God to do some of the things that he does it's not right for him to allow some of the things that he allows we must step back and remember who and what we are we are finite limited sinful formed from dirt nothing but plasma plastic something molded we know nothing of the ways and the wisdom of the almighty that's there to be known before this God man is a crippled blind polluted leper and yet he's going to analyze and criticize the ways of the

almighty what ought our response be to put our hand over our mouth and bow to this God that's it that's what it ought to be but that's not the response of most people but how can God Paul says don't go there woe to him who strives with his maker you small piece of clay you formed thing evaluate who are you to evaluate and pass judgment on the ways of the almighty but it's not fair let me ask you how many want fair do you really want I promise you we don't want fair fair injustice calling for justice means getting what you deserve fair guess what you get instead here's what God says to those who pray protest who are you to reply against God don't try to figure out with human reasoning and intellect the ways of God you can't you must submit your mind and your knowledge and your spirit, and

your conscience, and your heart to this God who reigns over all.

And bow to Him. We must realize and remember that if we can't worship and love the God of Romans 9, we can't worship and love the God of John 3.16. This is true.

You think this isn't applicable in our day, in our culture? The latter sent an email to some of us. I don't know who all got it, but it was a quote by the NPR senior analyst, Daniel Shore, 80-year-old man, senior news analyst, Daniel Shore. After he heard President Bush say that both evolution and intelligent design ought to be at least equally be taught, both views in the public schools, Shore then leaked Hurricane Katrina with the concept of intelligent design.

And Shore said this, quote, If Katrina was the result of intelligent design, then the designer has something to answer for. Well, John Piper replied to him. Here was the reply.

The Lord answered Job and Mr. Shore out of the whirlwind. Who is this that darkens my counsel by words without knowledge? Shall the pot say to the potter, This is an unintelligent way to show your power. Come,

Maker of heaven and earth, set at My feet.

I've lived 80 years and I've got much wisdom, and I'll teach you, the eternal God, how to govern the universe. No, God doesn't answer to Daniel Shore or anyone. We answer to Him.

And the only answer there is, is guilty as charged. Who is any man to reply against God? Well, let me apply this. How does God's sovereignty apply first to the unbeliever? I asked Brother Charles this a few weeks ago, and he said this, It means you can't win fighting against God.

You can't win against this God. You never win, ever. If you today don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, you are in a boxing ring with the ruler of the universe.

You ain't going to win. Lay down your weapons of rebellion. You will never win, ever.

You always lose resisting this God. Secondly, it means for the unbeliever that God is in control, not them. It means He's in charge, not the unbeliever.

It means He's going to do with them ultimately what He wills to do with them. It means that your life and your times and your health and your future and the day of your appointed death are in His hands, not yours. That's what it means.

Your eternal destiny and your final judgment are in His hands. You are not free. So you better start crying out for mercy from the hand of the One who can give it.

For the unbeliever, this sovereign God, will find them either to be a vessel of wrath for the display of His justice and His righteousness, or a vessel of mercy for the display of His sovereign and free grace. He controls all things, even the final and eternal destinies of the souls of men. It means this, if you're not a Christian, and it means this for every unbeliever, that God holds their eternal destiny in His hand and He can justly put them in hell at any moment.

So you better start crying out for mercy. Jonathan Edwards told this to young people in his congregation and in his town. Listen to what he said to them.

There is nothing that keeps wicked people at any moment out of hell except the free pleasure of God. I mean, he says, His sovereign will, which is restrained by no obligation and hindered by no difficulty. There is no lack of power in God to cast wicked people into hell at any moment.

The strongest have no power to resist Him. Who are we, what are we, that we should think to stand before Him at whose rebuke the earth trembles? Natural men are held in the hand of God over the pit of hell. In short, they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of, and all that preserves them every moment is the free, unobliged, sovereign will of a righteous God.

Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, Edwards said, the earth would bear you no longer for you are a burden to it. This is the God the Bible gives us. So you better cry out for mercy if you are not a Christian.

Now how does sovereignty apply to the Christian? What a glorious reality it is that this God, who controls all things for His glory, is perfectly good and faithful and can fully be trusted. This God, who is sovereign, is perfectly good and faithful and can fully be trusted. He has become our Father through faith in His Son.

This is a sure resting place for the heart, is it not? What a reality. Our lives are not the product of blind faith or of chance, but every detail of them have been ordained from all eternity. Our lives are ordered by the living God.

Not a hair of our heads, though they decline progressively, not a hair of our head can be touched without His permission. What a comfort this is. What an assurance and comfort this gives the Christian.

My times, David said, are in Thy hand, so let us rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. My friend Sam Storms gives six ifs about believing God is sovereign. He says, if I did not believe in the absolute sovereignty of God, number one, I would despair of my eternal destiny and would have no assurance of salvation if I didn't believe God was sovereign.

Number two, I would be terrified of all suffering with no confidence that God can turn evil for good and bring me safely through if God weren't sovereign. If God weren't sovereign, He said I would become manipulative in evangelism, believing that the conversion of a soul is altogether a matter of my will and skill versus the will and skill of the sinner. And I would cease praying.

Number four, for God to convert and save the lost. If the ultimate factor in human conversion is a self-determined human will, then it is futile and useless to ask God to touch or move upon the human heart so as to bring somebody to faith. Number five, if God were not sovereign, I would despair of the political process.

I mean, if God weren't sovereign, think how He would feel today. All my plans have failed in America. I've run out.

What do I do now? Angels, call a council. Find someone wiser than I so I can draw some new wisdom. No, if God weren't sovereign, I would despair of the political process and live in fear or resentment of the elected officials who oppose the kingdom of God.

Number six, I would live in fear of nature. Tornadoes, earthquakes, volcanoes, and hurricanes if He weren't sovereign. But He is, and I'm so glad.

Oh, mercy. A final application. Take this home to your heart.

God could have made you a Pharaoh. Romans 2 says, are we better than they? God could have let you be like that. God could have allowed you and even hardened you to be a vessel of dishonor.

Where this afternoon, you wouldn't be here. You'd be drunk and passed out in your vomit. God could have allowed you to become a vessel of wrath.

He could have left you to justly perish. Any one of us men in here today could be Scott Peterson on death row. Does your self-righteousness well up in your heart and say, not me? Then you ought to repent before God.

There's none different. A prostitute on the street could be you today. A criminal.

Any of you ladies could have been the woman in Houston who drowned her five children when she heard a voice telling her to do so. That could have been you. You say, not me.

You don't know what you could have become had not the restraining mercy and grace of God kept you. Do we see that we were fallen, messed up clay? Listen to the words of the hymn writer. "T'was all by grace we were brought to obey, while others were suffered to go, the road which by nature we choose as our own, which leads to the regions of woe.

Oh, had He not pitied the state you were in, His love your bosom had ne'er felt, you all would have lived, would have died too in sin, and sunk with the load of your guilt. What was there in you that would merit esteem, or give the Creator delight? T'was even so, Father, you ever must sing, because it seemed good in your sight." Let me quickly give two or three warnings to those of us who believe God is sovereign. Number one, beware of drawing an excuse for your sin from the sovereignty of God.

What a wicked thing to do. God's sovereign person is most holy and is in no way ever any cause of any sin we commit. Every sin is an act of rebellion.

It's an act of treason against a gracious, sovereign, almighty, righteous, good, loving Father. It's a breach of His holy law. And though He has by a permissive decree allowed moral evil in this world, yet that has no influence on us to commit sin.

Beware of using His sovereignty as an excuse for sin. Number two, beware of murmuring under times of difficulty and trial that you may go through. We must remember and we must believe in our hearts when all feelings are gone.

We must know that nothing happens without a wise and sovereign, loving Father's hand who knows what's best and good for us. In all cases, even in the middle of the most afflicting experiences that happen to you, learn submission to your Father's will. Warning number three, beware of anxious cares and fearfulness about your well-being in this passing life.

Our Lord cautions us against this. Matthew 6, verse 21, Take no fearful, anxious thought for your life, what you'll eat, what you'll drink, what you'll put on. If our God has become our Father and He's sovereign, what do we have to fear? What do we have to fear? The worst things that could happen to us only become sanctifying friends to make us more like Him and fit us more for heaven.

So what do we have to fear? Fear is unbelief. What a thing! What a thing! Never let the fear of man or the fear of circumstances or events stop you from your duty, but let your soul trust in Him who rules and governs all things for His purpose. Happy is the people whose God is the Lord.

You today, as His child, can set secure in exercising faith toward Him. Come what will. You have good reason for prayer, because He, as our sovereign God, is a prayer-hearing God.

He will be inquired of by His people for all their concerns in this life. We have ground for the greatest encouragement and comfort in the face of all events, because they are managed and governed by our God and Father and gracious Friend who will never neglect or overlook His dear people and what concerns them. Isaac Watts wrote a hymn on Romans 9. Let me share it with you in closing.

Listen to this. Behold the potter in the clay. He forms his vessels as he's pleased.

Such is our God and such are we, the subjects of His high decree. Does not the potter's power extend? Or all the mass, which part to choose? And mold it for a nobler end and which to leave for viler use? May not the sovereign God on high dispense His favors as He will? Choose some to life while others die and yet be

just and gracious still? What if to make His terror known, He let His patience long endure, suffering vile rebels to go on and seal their own destruction? Sure, shall man reply against this God and call his maker's ways unjust, the thunder of whose dreadful word can crush a thousand worlds to dust? But, O my soul, if truth so bright should dazzle and confound your sight, yet still His written will obey and wait that great decisive day, then shall He make His justice known and the whole world before His throne with joy or terror shall confess the glory of His righteousness. Our God is sovereign.

Let's worship Him. Amen.

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