

The Sovereignty of Divine Grace

by Thomas Reade

The sovereignty of divine grace is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, emphasizing God's free and unmerited gift of salvation to humanity.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 29:29, Acts 20:27, Romans 3:23, Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:4, Ephesians 2:8, Colossians 3:12, Titus 1:2, 1 Peter 1:2, 1 John 5:11

Topics: "Divine Sovereignty", "Election Doctrine"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches on the sovereignty of divine grace, emphasizing the importance of humility, faith, and prayer in understanding the gospel. He delves into the doctrine of Election, highlighting the controversies and the need for a humble heart to receive God's revelations. Reade stresses the necessity of acknowledging God's sovereignty in bestowing His gifts and the inability of man to save himself. He concludes by emphasizing the practical application of the Gospel truths in our lives, urging believers to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit and live in accordance with God's will.

Transcript

49. ON THE SOVEREIGNTY OF DIVINE GRACE

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." Deut. 29:29

"For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God." Acts 20:27

Humility, faith, and prayer, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, are essential to the right reception of divine Truth. A peculiar state of heart, rather than much strength of intellect, is required in order to comprehend the gospel. Its sublime truths, though hidden from the wise and prudent, are revealed unto babes; "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way." "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him; and he will show them his covenant." "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God."

The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. Thousands have been led astray by "philosophy and vain deceit," by "science, falsely so called." The pride of human reason has always opposed the humiliating revelations of the Spirit. The fall of man and its direful consequences on the human race; the redemption of sinners, through the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ the Son of God; the regeneration

of the soul, through the power of the Holy Spirit; the sovereignty of God in the bestowment of his gifts, having mercy on whom he will have mercy; the utter inability of man to save himself; and his everlasting obligations to the free grace of God, through the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, are subjects which fill heaven with praise; and the volumes of the philosophical skeptic with doubts and ridicule!

The unhumiliated heart, continually rises against the doctrine of the Sovereignty of Divine Grace. Man is naturally self-righteous. He seeks to find in himself the meritorious cause of his future hoped-for felicity. Heaven is an object of his desire, because it is a place of rest; not because it is a state of holiness. The man of the world understands neither the nature of heavenly bliss, nor the way to attain it. If he is a professing member of the Christian Church, he observes her ceremonies, and practices some moral duties. On these he rests his hopes of heaven. As pain and hell are united together, he naturally shrinks from the idea of torment; and yet, he lives in sin, the sure road which leads into the fiery gulf! So blind, so inconsistent is fallen man!

In treating on the great doctrine of Election, one of the fruits of sovereign grace, much controversy and angry disputes have been carried on between different sections of the Christian Church; some almost excommunicating and anathematizing those who differ from them. But "wisdom is justified of all her children." The true believer, who is "clothed with humility;" whose heart is as a weaned child; weaned from the pride of intellect, from the shackles of human systems, from a vainglorious display of theological attainments, will receive with meekness all that the Lord reveals.

He may, indeed, when contemplating the mysteries of grace, be led to exclaim with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" Or with Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" but the declaration; "Thus says the Lord," ever satisfies his mind. This sacred seal, placed upon the most abstruse revelations of the mind of God, is quite sufficient. He needs no more. And what is the result? He enjoys the peace of God; the sweet assurance of his love; the hope of glory, through the atoning blood of Christ.

It is then at our peril, if we add unto, or diminish anything from, the word of God. As there were "Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life;" so, lest the unhallowed hands of reasoning pride should mutilate or encumber the Scriptures of Truth, they are guarded, both by a command and a threatening, "You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

"Dangerous it is for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High; whom although to know is life, and joy to make mention of his name; yet our soundest knowledge is, to know that we know him not as indeed he is, neither can know him; and our safest eloquence concerning him, is our silence, when we confess without confession, that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacity and reach. He is above, and we upon earth; therefore it behooves our words to be wary and few." (Thomas Hooker)

The humble believer, who is taught of God, will receive the mysteries of the kingdom, as the Spirit has been pleased to reveal them; and instead of endeavoring to explain them by his finite capacity, will rest

satisfied with the divine assurance; "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." This composed the mind of the inspired Paul; "Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now."

We should never meditate upon the doctrine of Election, but with the profoundest reverence, humility, and child-like dependence on the teaching of the Holy Spirit. We know nothing of this mysterious truth but by the Scriptures. It is therefore the safest way to receive it, just as it is recorded, without endeavoring to supply, by our shallow comprehension, what Infinite Wisdom has thought fit to conceal.

From all eternity, God saw the end from the beginning. There is no 'before' or 'after' to the divine mind; it is one 'eternal present'. Nothing new, nothing unforeseen, or unknown, can happen to that Omniscient Jehovah, who made all things, and who holds all creation together. "Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world." To this fundamental truth, declared by James, every orthodox Christian must subscribe. He, who inhabits eternity; He, who fills heaven and earth with his presence; He, in whom we live, and move, and have our being; He, who knows all the secrets of the heart, and beholds all the ways of men, cannot be taken by surprise, or thwarted in his purposes and plans.

If this fundamental truth be granted, then it must necessarily follow, that God foresaw the fall of our first parents, and fore-ordained his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, as God manifest in the flesh, to become the Savior of our fallen race. The sin of Adam was his own. It sprang from a willful disobedience to the divine command. JUSTICE pronounced the sentence of death on the guilty pair; but MERCY proclaimed pardon through the seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head. How inconceivably great are the riches of sovereign grace. This was a redemption as unexpected, as it was unsought. Truly, mercy rejoiced against judgment. The Almighty declared himself to be a just God, and yet a Savior. His own arm brought salvation.

From Genesis to the Revelation, salvation is revealed as the free unmerited work of God. The Fountain of Grace is in God Himself. The copious streams flow down to us through Jesus Christ, and all our services ascend with acceptance only by, and through Him. We "are not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world." And true believers are said to have their names "written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Paul broke out into an anthem of praise on this account; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes." He told the Roman converts that, whom God "did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." And to the Thessalonians he said; "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." To Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, Paul thus writes; "So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

To Titus, his "own son after the common faith," the Apostle expresses his view of the divine sovereignty; "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness-- a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior." Peter also addressed the strangers scattered abroad by the rude hand of persecution, as "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

If we receive these inspired declarations, which contain the will of God respecting his redeemed people, in their plain grammatical meaning, apart from prejudice, and unwarped by human philosophical systems, surely we cannot fail to acknowledge the sovereignty of God in his acts of grace.

But alas! the pride of fallen reason rises against the sovereignty of Jehovah. The natural heart cannot stoop so low, as to accept of salvation through the righteousness of another, and irrespective of any foreseen goodness in the recipient. But, however wretched man may oppose the freeness of divine grace, the Apostles declare, in unequivocal language- that God is the Author of Salvation; that his gifts are sovereign, flowing from everlasting to everlasting; that he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, to the praise of the glory of his grace. He is debtor to none, "for all have sinned, and come short of his glory;" all, therefore, deserve to perish. If any are saved, it is not through any righteousness of their own, "for there is none righteous, no, not one," but through the unspeakable love of God. None can claim salvation as a right; all may, and must petition for it, as an unmerited gift. None who seek for it through the merits of Christ, with earnest prayer, and by humble faith, shall be rejected. The promise is full and clear; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Humility will embrace this great salvation; when pride expires at the foot of the Cross.

Our destruction is altogether from ourselves. The Omniscient Jehovah foresaw the issue of Satan's temptation, and in his inscrutable wisdom permitted man to fall, but in doing so, he remained the same holy and good Being, and can be in no way chargeable with his creature's transgression. To believe otherwise would be blasphemy in the extreme. Man was created a rational being, a free agent. When he ate of the forbidden fruit he did it with the consent of his own will. Satan could not force our first parents to eat. The act was their own. He presented the alluring bait; he proposed specious arguments; he threw in doubtful insinuations respecting the divine prohibition; the poison operated, the temptation succeeded, and they fell through yielding to Satan's infidel suggestions. They disbelieved the words of their Creator, and fell from the heights of holiness and happiness, into the depths of sin and woe!

As a child partakes of the nature of the parent, so, when Adam fell, all his posterity fell in him. He became the head of a fallen race. Original sin having tainted the fountain, it embittered and polluted all the streams. "In Adam all die." Human pride revolts at this humiliating truth, though it forms the basis upon which redemption rests. The glorious doctrines of grace, like the rainbow, shine the brightest in the darkest cloud.

All, then, are sinners without exception. The violated Law of God condemns the whole human race. Hence it follows, that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified. Where, then, is salvation to be found? Only in and through the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. As we are lost under the covenant of works, so we can only be saved under the covenant of grace.

Will, then, the whole human race be saved? The Scriptures tell us, that none, to whom the gospel is preached, will be saved, but those who truly believe in Jesus; who receive him into their heart by faith and love; who mourn over and forsake their sins; and who bring forth the fruits of the Spirit in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. With respect to the Heathen, who have never heard the gospel, nor enjoyed the means of hearing of a Savior's love, the Judge of all the earth will do right.

The carnal mind is enmity against God. With a darkened understanding, a rebellious will, and corrupt affections, the natural man, like Naaman, turns away in a rage from the simple, but efficacious remedy of God's providing. Every man, woman, and child, in every age, would thus reject Christ and his great salvation, if God did not, in his rich mercy, incline the hearts of some to embrace Jesus as their only Savior. If left to ourselves, we would never come to Christ. And so powerful is this corrupt bent of the will to evil, that we never could come to Him, if God did not make us willing in the day of his power, if he did not draw us by the secret but constraining influences of his Holy Spirit.

The God of all grace does not force us to come to Christ against our will; but he sets before us our lost condition by nature, the hatefulfulness of sin, and all its direful consequences; the suitability of Christ to all our needs; his loveliness and preciousness in all his offices and characters; the beauty of holiness, and the bliss of heaven; and then, by an all-illuminating and attractive energy, he convinces and captivates our minds to embrace freely and fully, Jesus Christ, as all our salvation, and all our desire. "By grace are you saved," was the delightful theme of Paul.

Such a soul, thus choosing Christ as its portion, is a vessel of mercy, "sanctified, and made fit for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." Such a soul is declared in Scripture to be "chosen in" Christ "before the foundation of the world;" for wherever the doctrine of election is mentioned, it is invariably connected with holiness. These holy souls, transformed by divine grace into the image of Christ, form, collectively, the true Church, the body of Christ, of which he is the head; the spouse to whom he is the husband. They are called the people of God; the children of God; the heirs of God. They are admitted to a delightful fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. They are the temples of the Holy Spirit; the habitation of God through the Spirit. They are the wheat among the tares; the good fish among the bad; the wise among the foolish virgins; the fruitful among the unfruitful branches, as declared by our Lord in his parabolical descriptions of the visible Church, in which the good and the evil mingle together until the day of final separation, when the people prepared by the Lord, shall forever inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

How monstrous, then, are the objections made by some people to this doctrine of grace, who assert that if any one is elected he will be saved, however unholy his life may be.

As the Bible is designed for the instruction of all mankind, so all may read their character in that sacred volume. The whole human race is divided into two great classes, believers and unbelievers, saints and sinners, the righteous and the wicked; those who serve God, and those who serve him not. In one or other of these distinctive classes will all be ranged at the judgment day, when Christ will separate the righteous from the wicked, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. To each of these two broadly defined characters, the blessing and the curse; the promise and the threatening, is made. Hence it is said; "He that believes, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believes not, shall be damned." The wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."

Should any one, through divine grace, become a believer in Jesus, he changes his state before God, he becomes entitled, through the merits of Christ, to the blessing and the promise; is made a member of Christ's mystical body; and thus, by the work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope, evidences his election of God.

The way and means for the salvation of sinners, was fore-ordained; even the incarnation, sufferings, death, and glorification of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; as also our sanctification through the gift and power of the Holy Spirit.

Faith is likewise the divinely-appointed instrument, by which the sinner is enabled to lay hold on Christ as his Savior and Advocate with the Father; and the moment any one is empowered through grace to believe from the heart in the Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed and set forth in the Scriptures, he passes from death unto life, is adopted into the family of God, becomes a member of the Church militant, reads his title to glory in the work of Christ, and, through the sanctifying grace of the Spirit, progressively advancing in his soul, makes his calling and election sure.

In Scripture this exalted blessing is not offered to a few; no! blessed be God, the offers of salvation are made alike to all; the invitation is general, the command to preach the gospel is unlimited; "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." None are excluded, but such as through unbelief exclude themselves. The destruction of sinners is the fruit of their own voluntary choice; the free act of their own rebellious wills, in opposition to the sweetest calls of mercy, the gracious strivings of the Spirit, the powerful checks of conscience, the solemn alarms of Providence, and the recorded threatenings of Scripture. Thus man is the author of his own misery, and willfully judges himself unworthy of eternal life.

Whatever excuses men may now make for their sins, a day is coming, a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, when he will render to every man according to his deeds. Then will every unbeliever, every unconverted sinner, like the man without the wedding garment, stand speechless and self-condemned before the Judge of the living and the dead; while all the happy members of Christ's family, his Church redeemed from the earth, shall appear before him without "spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," giving to God the glory of their salvation, and praising and adoring the Lamb that was slain; who washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them kings and priests unto God.

The Scriptures of truth, and the preaching of the Gospel, are the two great instruments in the hands of the Spirit for enlightening the world and turning sinners from the power of Satan unto God. It is, therefore, our duty, as it is our privilege, to sit under a faithful ministry, and to read the word of God with earnest prayer, that the promised blessing may accompany the means.

The Spirit always addresses us by the word, and treats us as rational creatures; therefore, we are proper subjects for invitations, warnings, cautions, directions, etc. To enter into the niceties of controversy tends to confuse the mind, not to edify it. The way of salvation is plain and clear. The mode of effecting it is far beyond our conception. The incarnation of the Eternal Word, and the secret operations of the Holy Spirit on the human soul, are subjects which will forever occupy the meditations of the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven. Here "we see through a glass darkly," and yet, quite clear enough to condemn us, if we miss the heavenly road.

What we need is a humble, childlike spirit, to receive the great truths of the Gospel as Practical Truths, which are revealed, not to make us disputers, but disciples of Jesus Christ, to restore us to the love and favor of God through faith in his blood; and to a holy conformity to that divine image which we lost by the

Fall. This is the new birth, the new creation, that transformation which passes upon every soul before it can be admitted into the Paradise above.

It is of great spiritual importance that we consider all the doctrines of the Gospel in this practical view. They were not given us as subjects for speculation, but as most precious truths, on the right embracing of which our everlasting salvation depends. What will it avail that I fancy myself to be one of the elect of God, if I am destitute of their character as portrayed in the Holy Scriptures? We are told, an painful experience teaches us, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." This heart must be changed by divine grace, before we can have any scriptural hope of enjoying heaven; and if our hearts are changed, it will be effected by the grace and power of Christ, who is the author and finisher of our faith, the giver of true repentance, and the fountain of all spiritual blessings, which he sheds abundantly on every contrite heart.

The doctrine of Election, as revealed in the word of God, is very sweet to humble holy souls, in an hour of darkness or affliction; whereby they are enabled to trust in the Lord, and to rest themselves upon their God. But it is dangerous for carnal people, lacking the Spirit of God; for they convert the children's bread into poison, and thus, to them, the word of life becomes the savor of death unto death.

Let us, then, seek for those graces which are the undeniable evidences of saving faith, and the indisputable marks of the elect of God. These the Apostle mentions; "Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony."

Happy, indeed, are they who can read their own character, in some humble measure, in this concise description of true believers. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they, (and they only), are the Sons of God;" for, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him."

Oh! all-gracious Father, whose love and power are infinite, enable me, while a sojourner on mercy's ground, to seek you where alone you can be found, in Christ my Savior. Stretch forth your arm, and save me from sinking beneath the waves of destruction. Draw me to your mercy-seat. Speak peace to my soul. Destroy all evil in my heart. Fill me with light and love, and with all the fruits of the Spirit. Unite me to the Savior by a living faith. Make me a member of your true Church, that, being chosen in Christ through your sovereign grace, I may glorify you here, by a life of holiness, and then at death enjoy a life of happiness in your blissful presence, where is fullness of joy; and at your right hand, where are pleasures for evermore.

How can the world true bliss bestow,

Where thorny cares and sorrows grow?

On Christ alone, my hope is laid,

Whose love the great Atonement made.

His blood can peace and joy procure,

His faithful word is ever sure.

If Satan comes in evil hour,
Jesus helps me by his Power;
He, by his Cross, the foe subdues,
While faith, the bleeding Savior views.
Through Him, my soul each foe defies,
And happy in his grace relies.
If I forsake the living way,
And careless from my Savior stray;
An awful gloom is soon o'erspread,
For Jesus to my heart has said
"Did I expire upon the tree
That you the friend of sin should be?"
A pilgrim here, I often sigh,
Overwhelmed with grief and misery;
I then exclaim; "no light I see,
My Jesus has forgotten me."
But still my Lord does pity take,
Though earthly parents should forsake.
To this dear Friend I will repair,
Whose love can all my burdens bear;
His grace can cheer affliction's hour,
His Spirit give the strengthening power,
Oh! until he come from heaven above,
May I abide in Jesus' love.

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