



# The Absolute Reign

The Sermon

Acts 4:23-31

## 13 | Dilemma of the Statement - Freewill | Acts 4:28

*“To do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done”* (Acts 4:28).

The sovereignty of God is a controversial issue, dividing the church in its application. All theologians believe in the sovereignty of God so this is really not an issue. If God were not sovereign He would not be God. The difficulty is in what this means in regard to His involvement in my life. If God is sovereign, and He has a plan for my life, how does that sovereignty affect my living? Do I have a choice or am I a puppet on a string fulfilling the dream of God for my life? Am I a prisoner trapped in the clutches of One greater than I am? If this is true, God is another word for fate!

There are those who propose that the sovereignty of God negates the freewill of man. God is absolutely responsible for everything that happens in my life. God predestines mankind. Your choice does not determine your salvation; God’s sovereignty determines the destiny of every man. Judas was predestined by God to betray Jesus; God predestined Saul of Tarsus to receive the blinding light of Jesus’ presence on the Damascus Road; God predestined John to be exiled on Patmos. Everything is determined by the sovereignty of God. Some will be saved while others will be damned. Whatever will be, will be!

Then there are those who propose the opposite, saying that God set things in motion, and although God is sovereign He has no interest in me. I am completely on my own without intervention from Him. The variables beyond my understanding consistently work in my life causing chaos. I must not confuse these chaotic circumstances with God for He is not involved. He left us to master our fate and determine our destiny. God is sovereign but is disinterested in my life.

If we become obsessed with the few verses proposing the idea of predestination, we quickly experience problems. When we see any idea mentioned in the Scripture outside of the reality of the whole Scriptures, we are quickly confused. For instance, if sovereign God determines the salvation of every person without the choice of that person, Adam and Eve were victims of His sovereignty. God, who cannot sin, became the Author and Creator of sin. God who created man caused His creation to experience sin. Immediately He went to great lengths, over a long period of time, and with significant sacrifice to Himself to eliminate and save from sin. Do we have the right to ask: why didn’t God simply stop sin at the beginning and eliminate such sacrifice? He became the cause of the mess that demanded His personal sacrifice.

The use of “predestination” in the New Testament is limited. The Greek word “proorizo,” meaning “predestination,” has a variety of translations in the New Testament. In our passage it is translated *“determined”* (Acts 4:28). Paul’s use of this term is translated *“ordained”* in reference to the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 2:7). Four other times Paul uses this term and it is translated *“predestined”* (Romans 8:29, 30; Ephesians 1:5, 11). Six times in the New Testament predestination refers to events and people God foreordained before all time or before their concrete historical time.

A careful examination of these verses reveals a consistent fact. The predestination does not regard a particular person; no name is mentioned. When people are involved in the predestination it is always a group or category of people. In other words, those who qualify by meeting certain requirements form the group. For instance, Paul declared, *“having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will”* (Ephesians 1:5). There is a category of people who became sons of God! Who are they? The premise of the passage refers to those who are *“in Him.”* *“Spiritual blessings”* are *“in Him;”* *“chose us”* is *“in Him.”* *“Holy and without blame”* is *“in Him.”* The groups of people who are *“in Him”* are predestined to become sons of God. Paul expands this thought into the wonder of an *“inheritance”* (Ephesians 1:11). It is for those who are *“in Him.”*

This same truth is declared to the Romans! *“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified”* (Romans 8:29, 30). The Greek word *“proginosko,”* translated *“foreknew”* focuses on the most intimate knowledge. This is a group of people who are *“conformed to the image of His Son, called, justified”* and *“glorified.”* These qualities are all in those He knows; but how could He know them without these qualities?

This same predestination is applied to *“wisdom.”* It is *“the hidden wisdom which God ordained (predestined) before the ages, for our glory”* (1 Corinthians 2:7). Paul said what we experience now in Jesus was planned by God before time. Paul called the Gospel we preach *“a mystery.”* None of the rulers of this age understand this mystery. However it was present in the wisdom of God before this age began! The sovereignty of God ordained its truth. Therefore, sovereignty is the strength of God’s wisdom. God established absolute truths!

Now we come to our passage (Acts 4:27-28). God brought the evil world together to carry out His predestined plan. God turned evil on itself causing its destruction. Evil did its worst to Jesus only to discover the worst became His best. Defeat designed to eliminate produced victory. Death conquered and life triumphed. Evil participated in the destruction of itself, and God predetermined it in His sovereign wisdom! God is sovereign!

## The Problem

It is not difficult to understand God’s sovereignty. If God were not sovereign, He would not be God. Humanity never tolerates a weak and insufficient God. All the children of Israel with the prophets met at “Mount Carmel” (1 Kings 18). It was the mount of contest! The sovereign God must answer by fire. A time comes in everyone’s life when Santa Claus is set aside and the tooth fairy no longer visits. If God is sovereign He must prove it! We simply will not tolerate a God who cannot intervene in our lives.

The sovereignty of God is necessary and acceptable, but the problem is “absolute” sovereignty. We have learned that *“absolute power brings absolute corruption.”* Surely there are limitations to the God’s sovereignty. If God does not draw the lines, we will draw them for Him. If God has absolute sovereignty, He will be consistently confronted with the question “why?” The tragedies of life will cause men to hurl accusations at the sovereign God.

We will find those who say that although God is absolutely sovereign He does not cause everything. This simply sidesteps the real question, which pushes that question further back causing another confrontation. For if God did not cause it, and He is absolutely sovereign, He most certainly allowed it. Does this not carry with it the same responsibility? If God is sovereign over every event in my life, could He not cause cancer, or simply prevent it as well? Either way is He not responsible for the cancer? So God, “Why do I have cancer?” Everyone experiences something in his or her life that raises the question “Why?” When confronting God with such a question is He consistently silent concerning the issue? He covers His sovereign guilt with the proposal that we must simply believe. I am to simply trust Him in the midst of my crisis regardless of the consequence.

All of man's accusations lead back to this same dilemma. There is terrible sin and evil in the world. We are at war with demonic forces. But if God is absolutely sovereign why is the devil not immediately defeated and the terrible destruction of evil eliminated? Why does God allow this to go on repeatedly? So the grandfather's sin flows into the father's sin that flows into the son's sin. What chance does the younger generation have? Where is a sovereign God in the midst of such chaos? How can I believe that God is absolutely good in His sovereignty? All I experience is evil, heartache, and death? I am not sovereign in power and certainly not sovereign in righteousness; however, I cannot stand this in my world. How can God who is sovereign in power and in righteousness tolerate it?

If we really want to push the issue, we must ask this question? Why would a sovereign God let a puny person like me challenge His integrity? Why would He allow masses of us to stand with our fists in the air in defiance of His sovereignty? It is the cry of our passage:

*“Why did the nations rage,  
And the people plot vain things?  
The kings of the earth took their stand,  
And the rulers were gathered together  
Against the Lord and His Christ,”* (Acts 4:25-26).

## **The Provision**

The answer is not that complicated! The answer is in the granting of “freewill.” God gives us the freedom of choice? If such a reality is true, does this not negate His sovereignty? How can God grant freewill to humanity and at the same time maintain His sovereignty? Again, is there not a simple answer? If God is absolutely sovereign, does He not have the right to limit that sovereignty by granting freewill to humanity? This limitation would simply validate His sovereignty. Who is greater in sovereignty? Is it the person who is in control and must have his own way? Is it the person who is in total control but limits that control to allow others freedom of choice? The reality of God giving us freewill declares to us the absoluteness of His sovereignty.

The results of this limitation highlight the greatness of this truth! Since God is sovereign in wisdom, He understands the complete ramifications of giving humanity freewill. Our sovereign God did not regret His decision after experiencing the results of the limitation. “Freewill” opened the door of possibility to the creation of a new realm, “rebellion.” It is not creation in the same manner sovereignty would create. Sovereignty creates something from nothing. “Sin” simply takes what is already created and twists it based on an attitude of rebellion. Ironically, the basis of the rebellion is sovereignty. The sovereignty of God giving the freedom of choice becomes the focus of rebellion. Man wants to be sovereign! He does not desire to be absolutely sovereign as God is but he does want to reign over his universe. In other words, it is self-sovereignty!

Therefore, my ultimate and only choice of God's granted freewill in my life is between who will be sovereign, God or self? If we choose to live in personal absolute self-sovereignty we will experience the illusion of that sovereignty. There are dozens of variables flowing into our lives over which we have no control. We did not choose them, and we cannot eliminate them. We are not in control and are not sovereign. But it does not matter to us; we continue to live in the illusion that we are “Lord” of our own life. A man who was created to be nothing more than a man decides to be god! He is totally incapable of such a role; his consistent failures scream this reality. God gives us freewill to choose Him as absolute sovereign of our lives. We were created to be dependent not independent. Jesus is Lord; we are not. The chaos of our personal distress is in this dilemma.

## The Proof

No one dominated by self-centered sovereignty would choose to grant freewill and create the possibility of such chaos. If God were absolutely sovereign in both wisdom and power, why would He give man a freewill? Why would He grant such liberty with the knowledge of the sacrifice and personal suffering it requires? This is the conclusion of the entire matter!!!

God is not dominated by self-centered sovereignty. *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8, 16). Self-centered sovereignty weighs the odds. What benefits will we get in granting mankind freewill? The risk is too great and the benefits are too small; a nature focused on self will not enter into such an endeavor. But God’s nature is love; it is “agape” love, selfless, self-sacrificing, and self-giving. Such a nature demands the granting of freewill regardless of the risk. This is the only feasible explanation.

The absolute sovereignty and power of Almighty God does not control His nature of love; God’s nature of love controls His absolute sovereignty and power. He does not leverage His power to protect His love; He leverages His love to administrate His power. Everything in the character of God is dominated and demonstrated through His nature. The love of God must be the first thought. Any deviation of this is a sacrilege on the nature of God. It makes the sovereignty of God an instrument of self-centeredness.

Yes, all the kings of the earth represented by *“Herod”* got together, joined by *“Pontius Pilate”* representing all the rulers of the world. All the Gentile nations and the Jewish nation joined in the gathering. They came to do what their nature commanded them *“to do”* (Acts 4:27, 28). The sovereign God gave them freewill to choose according to their nature. He allowed them to rise in authority knowing how they would respond to Jesus. Their self-centered false sovereignty demanded the elimination of Jesus; Jesus was a threat to all self-focused sovereignty.

The absolute sovereign God allowed self-centered sovereign man to expose the worst of his nature. But in the midst of the destruction of self-centered sovereignty love won! God’s love was the only thing that survived. In the act of crucifixion and destruction, self-centeredness was embraced and brought to death. The nature of God conquered and generated life.

So here we are again! We are back at the beginning where Adam found himself in the Garden of Eden. We are granted freewill to choose! Our choice is simple: self-centered sovereignty or the sovereignty of God. We cannot serve two masters. Will Jesus be who He is in our lives, Lord? Will we continue in our illusion of self-sovereignty?