

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Living as Christians in a Secular Society Under the Sovereignty of God”
(Part IV of “Christian Living in a Secular Society”)
November 09, 2025

Scripture

Daniel 1:2, 9 & 17
Romans 11:33-36

Core Idea and purpose

Core ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- (10/19/2025) Going deep into God's written word sets us apart from secular society
- (10/26/2025) As we become holy, we will stand out from the secular world and God will use us to make the Kingdom of God more of a reality on earth.
- (11/02/2025) If we stay connected to Christ, we will produce the fruit of goodness, justice, and love and that will distinguish us from secular society

Core Idea: God is sovereign and that is very good news!!!

Challenge/purpose: To encourage people to live under the sovereignty of God.

The Sermon

I have very good news! It is among the best news in all of human history. Do you want to hear it? Well, here it is - God is sovereign! This is such good news, we need to let the world know. So, let's shout it out. On the count of three – 1, 2, 3 – **GOD IS SOVEREIGN!!!**

As Christians living in a secular society, we must always remember – God is sovereign. Some people will tell us there is no god but that shouldn't worry us because God is sovereign. There is hate in this world, but we shouldn't despair as we fight the hate because God is sovereign and this sovereign God is love. There is oppression in this world, but we shouldn't despair as we seek justice because God is sovereign and this sovereign God is a God of justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

The good news that God is sovereign is a major theme throughout the Written Word of God. It begins with the first verse of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” As Creator, God is sovereign over all that is seen and unseen. I could easily spend hours showing all the Bible passages that declare the sovereignty of God, but I won't do that. We'll just look at the first Chapter of Daniel.

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The Book of Daniel tells the story of the Prophet Daniel and his friends. It begins when King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire conquers Judah, deposes King Jehoiakim, and deports the Jewish nobility to Babylon to serve the Babylonian regime. This is the first of three waves of deportations, the third one culminating with the temple’s destruction. Daniel and his friends were part of this first wave of deportation.

There are three verses in Daniel chapter one that shows God’s sovereignty.

The first one is Daniel 1:2. It says, “And **the Lord delivered** Jehoiakim king of Judah into his [King Nebuchadnezzar’s] hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God...” Do you see God’s sovereignty here? It says, “...the Lord delivered...” This means that God either caused or allowed the Babylonians to defeat Judah.

The second one is Daniel 1:9. It says, “Now **God had caused** the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel...” Do you see God’s sovereignty here? It says, “...God had caused...” This doesn’t mean that God took away the official’s free will. The official still chose for himself to show favor and compassion to Daniel and his friends. God either did something to influence the official and/or knew how the official would act in certain circumstances.

The third one is Daniel 1:17. It says, “To these four young men **God gave** knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning...” Do you see sovereignty here? It says, “...God gave...” It is God who taught and empowered Daniel and his 3 friends to be the best in the Babylonian court.

So, if God is sovereign, we must ask: What does it mean for God to be sovereign? How is God sovereign? To answer these questions, it’s easiest to start by saying what it does not mean.

God’s sovereignty does **not** mean that God micromanages every detailed action on earth. God doesn’t control everything. Let’s say there’s a traffic light on a four-way intersection. The light turns green when it should stay red. So, a car speeds through the intersection, hits another car and kills a person. Although God is sovereign, the Lord did not cause the traffic light to malfunction. We live in a fallen world, and sometimes bad things simply happen. But, because God is sovereign and loving, we can count on God to get us through such a tragedy and come out on top.

Also, God’s sovereignty does **not** mean that we don’t have free will. We are not puppets, and God is not a puppeteer. [Show the puppet as you say this] God’s grace gives us the ability to choose – to choose between obeying or disobeying

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God. This is what the story of Adam and Eve is all about. God told Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit, the serpent tempted them to eat it, and they had to choose between obeying God or following the serpent. It was a free choice.

We all have free choice, but we must remember that it is free choice within the boundaries of natural law. I can freely choose to jump off a high building, but the law of gravity will dictate what happens to me.

The game of chess is a good way to understand God’s sovereignty. I enjoy playing chess, but I am a novice. I have not memorized all the ways to trap the King, neither am I skilled at thinking 3 or 4 moves ahead. But, when I play chess, I am free to move the pieces anyway I want within the rules of the game. I have free will. However, if I play a chess master, I will not determine the outcome of the game. The chess master will make that determination even though I can freely choose how to move my pieces. As you probably figured out, God is the master chess player, and we are the novices. Yes, we have free will, but God will ultimately determine the course of human history. That’s a good thing because if entirely left up to us, we might have already blown ourselves up.

Now we can talk about what it does mean for God to be sovereign.

First, human history will culminate with the new heaven and new earth. In other words, all creation will be redeemed. You can read about this in the last two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21-22. We can count on this because God is sovereign – the Master Chess player.

God’s sovereignty also means that God can fix our lives. Sometimes, because of our free will, we do things to mess up our lives. But God is sovereign, which means God can fix whatever we messed up. God can put our lives back on track.

About 11 years ago, I knew this wonderful guy who was an alcoholic. The church I was serving offered a free lunch on Sunday afternoons. This guy would show up drunk for the free lunch and, unfortunately, he was a violent drunk. So, we had to expel him from the ministry. About a week after his dismissal, I saw him hanging out in the downtown area and, surprisingly, he was sober. So, I chatted with him. He told me that alcohol will always enslave him and God was powerless to free him. When I mentioned going to a drug treatment program or Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), he said it would be a waste of time. This is a sad, sad case. This wonderful man did not believe God was sovereign and could, therefore, free him from alcohol addiction. So, he didn’t cooperate with God by going to a drug treatment program or attending A.A.

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About 5 or 6 years ago, one of my congregants was an alcoholic. She was highly intelligent and exuded joy and positivity wherever she went. She was always full of exuberant energy. But, due to her alcoholism, her marriage was in severe trouble, and she had a hard time maintaining a job. However, unlike the wonderful guy I just described, she knew that God is sovereign and could, therefore, fix her life. So, she was willing to cooperate with God. One day she reached out to me while drunk and asked me to take her to an A.A. meeting. I took her to the A.A. meeting and stayed with her through the meeting. From that point on, she attended AA meetings every week and, as far as I know, she is still sober.

Yes, God is sovereign and can therefore fix our lives. But to do so, we must cooperate with God.

Since God is sovereign, we must acknowledge God's sovereignty and choose to surrender to God's loving will. This is reflected in all the major decisions we make.

Let me give you one example. Our vote should show that we acknowledge God's sovereignty and choose to surrender to the loving will of God. The sovereign God is a God of justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people. In Jeremiah 21:12 & 22:3 God teaches us, “This is what the Lord says to you, house of David: Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed...This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.” If the sovereign God is a God of justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people, then we should vote for the candidate that best pursues justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

We should also consider that if God is sovereign and if Jesus is fully human and fully God, then Jesus is sovereign. He is the example we are to follow, and his teachings take precedence over any other teachings. Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, so that's what we must do. Jesus tells us to forgive, so that's what we must do. Jesus tells us to face oppression or mistreatment by turning the other cheek, so that's what we must do. Also, we need to understand Scripture through the eyes of Jesus.

One last thing to consider, if we serve a sovereign God, then we do not need economic, political, or social power. Nor do we need to be in control. Without seeking power or control, we trust God as we love everyone and pursue justice. Next week, we'll talk more about this. We'll look at Christian living in a secular society through a Biblical understating of power...Let's pray.

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Sermon Outline

I. I have very good news!

A. It is among the best news in all of human history.

- Do you want to hear it?
- Well, here it is - God is sovereign!
- This is such good news, we need to let the world know.
 - So, let's shout it out.
 - On the count of three – 1, 2, 3 – **GOD IS SOVEREIGN!!!**

B. As Christians living in a secular society, we must always remember – God is sovereign.

- Some people will tell us there is no god but that shouldn't worry us because God is sovereign.
- There is hate in this world, but we shouldn't despair as we fight the hate because God is sovereign and this sovereign God is love.
- There is oppression in this world, but we shouldn't despair as we seek justice because God is sovereign and this sovereign God is a God of justice for poor, oppressed, and marginalized people.

II. The good news that God is sovereign is a major theme throughout the Written Word of God.

A. It begins with the first verse of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

- As Creator, God is sovereign over all that is seen and unseen.

B. I could easily spend hours showing all the Bible passages that declare the sovereignty of God, but I won't do that.

- We'll just look at the first Chapter of Daniel.

III. The first chapter of Daniel

A. The Book of Daniel tells the story of the Prophet Daniel and his friends.

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- It begins when King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire conquers Judah, deposes King Jehoiakim, and deports the Jewish nobility to Babylon to serve the Babylonian regime.
 - (This is the first of three waves of deportations, the third one culminating with the temple’s destruction.)
 - Daniel and his friends were part of this first wave of deportation.
- B. There are three verses in Daniel chapter one that shows God’s sovereignty.
- The first one is Daniel 1:2.
 - It says, “And **the Lord delivered** Jehoiakim king of Judah into his [King Nebuchadnezzar’s] hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God...”
 - Do you see God’s sovereignty here? It says, “...the Lord delivered...”
 - This means that God either caused or allowed the Babylonians to defeat Judah.
 - The second one is Daniel 1:9.
 - It says, “Now **God had caused** the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel...”
 - Do you see God’s sovereignty here? It says, “...God had caused...”
 - This doesn’t mean that God took away the official’s free will.
 - The official still chose for himself to show favor and compassion to Daniel and his friends.
 - God either did something to influence the official and/or knew how the official would act in certain circumstances.
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- Do you see sovereignty here? It says, “...God gave...”
- It is God who taught and empowered Daniel and his 3 friends to be the best in the Babylonian court.

C. So, if God is sovereign, we must ask: What does it mean for God to be sovereign? How is God sovereign?

IV. To answer these questions, it's easiest to start by saying what it does not mean.

A. God's sovereignty does **not** mean that God micromanages every detailed action on earth.

- God doesn't control everything.
- Let's say there's a traffic light on a four-way intersection.
 - The light turns green when it should stay red.
 - So, a car speeds through the intersection, hits another car and kills a person.
 - Although God is sovereign, the Lord did not cause the traffic light to malfunction.
 - We live in a sinful world, and sometimes bad things simply happen.
 - But, because God is sovereign and loving, we can count on God to get us through such a tragedy and come out on top.

B. Also, God's sovereignty does **not** mean that we don't have free will.

- We are not puppets, and God is not a puppeteer. [Show the puppet as you say this]
- God's grace gives us the ability to choose – to choose between obeying or disobeying God.
- This is what the story of Adam and Eve is all about.
 - God told Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit, the serpent tempted them to eat it, and they had to choose between obeying God or following the serpent.
 - It was a free choice.

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- We all have free choice, but we must remember that it is free choice within the boundaries of natural law.
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V. The game of chess is a good way to understand God’s sovereignty.

- A. I enjoy playing chess, but I am a novice.
 - I have not memorized all the ways to trap the King, neither am I skilled at thinking 3 or 4 moves ahead.
- B. But, when I play chess, I am free to move the pieces anyway I want within the rules of the game.
 - I have free will.
- C. However, if I play a chess master, I will not determine the outcome of the game.
 - The chess master will make that determination even though I can freely choose how to move my pieces.
- D. As you probably figured out, God is the master chess player, and we are the novices.
 - Yes, we have free will, but God will ultimately determine the course of human history.
 - That’s a good thing because if entirely left up to us, we might have already blown ourselves up.

VI. Now we can talk about what it does mean for God to be sovereign.

- A. First, human history will culminate with the new heaven and new earth.
 - In other words, all creation will be redeemed.
 - You can read about this in the last two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21-22.
 - We can count on this because God is sovereign – the Master Chess player.
- B. God’s sovereignty also means that God can fix our lives.

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- Sometimes, because of our free will, we do things to mess up our lives.
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- God can put our lives back on track.
- About 11 years ago, I knew this wonderful guy who was an alcoholic.
 - The church I was serving offered a free lunch on Sunday afternoons.
 - This guy would show up drunk for the free lunch and, unfortunately, he was a violent drunk.
 - So, we had to expel him from the ministry.
 - About a week after his dismissal, I saw him hanging out in the downtown area and, surprisingly, he was sober.
 - So, I chatted with him.
 - He told me that alcohol will always enslave him and God was powerless to free him.
 - When I mentioned going to a drug treatment program or Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), he said it would be a waste of time.
 - This is a sad, sad case.
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 - But to do so, we must cooperate with God.
- C. Since God is sovereign, we must acknowledge God’s sovereignty and choose to surrender to God’s loving will.
- This is reflected in all the major decisions we make.
 - Let me give you one example. Our vote should show that we acknowledge God’s sovereignty and choose to surrender to the loving will of God.
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“Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed...This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no

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wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or
the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this
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- We should also consider that if God is sovereign and if Jesus is fully human and fully God, then Jesus is sovereign.
 - He is the example we are to follow, and his teachings take precedence over any other teachings.
 - Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, so that’s what we must do.
 - Jesus tells us to forgive, so that’s what we must do.
 - Jesus tells us to face oppression or mistreatment by turning the other cheek, so that’s what we must do.
 - Also, we need to understand Scripture through the eyes of Jesus.

VII. One last thing to consider, if we serve a sovereign God, then we do not need economic, political, or social power.

A. Nor do we need to be in control.

B. Without seeking power or control, we trust God as we love everyone and pursue justice.

C. Next week, we’ll talk more about this.

- We’ll look at Christian living in a secular world through a Biblical understating of power.

Let’s pray.