



PRESBYTERIANISM: THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Main Idea: A hallmark of Presbyterian theology is the sovereignty of God – the idea that God reigns over every aspect of creation.

Session Goals:

This session is intended to help participants...

- **Understand** the beginnings of the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions.
- **Become** familiar with some key Calvinist beliefs.
- **Examine** various positions on the doctrines of predestination and the sovereignty of God.
- **Recognize** the redemptive plan and power of God at work in the world and in our lives.

Biblical Foundation:



For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last He will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

(Job 19:25-17a)

In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!

I try to count them – they are more than the sand;
I come to the end – I am still with you.

(Psalm 139:16b-18)

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

(Romans 8:28)

Key Insights:

Two general characteristics of Presbyterian:

1. Presbyterians place an emphasis on experiencing God's grace – a moment of conversion or recognition.
2. Presbyterians tend to be a bit “cerebral”, loving God with their minds through theological and biblical mediation and reflection.

•Calvin's theology can be summarized in the five points of Calvinism (TULIP):

- T** Total depravity: Human beings are born into sin and cannot save themselves.
- U** Unconditional election: There are some people who were elected or chosen by God before the foundation of the earth to be God's people, to be saved – not by their merit, but by God's sovereign choice. Others were chosen for eternal damnation. (Note: Many Presbyterian today distance themselves from this doctrine of predestination.)
- L** Limited Atonement: Jesus' death on the cross atones for the sins of the elect only, not for the sins of those who are not elect.
- I** Irresistible grace: If you are elect, God has chosen you from the foundation of the earth; there is nothing you can do to resist God's grace.
- P** Perseverance of the saints: If you are elect or chosen by God for salvation, there is no way you can lose your salvation.

God is constantly working in our lives. He has a will for each of our lives and wants to fold us into his purposes and plans every day.

Group Discussion:

1. How did later reformers differ from Luther regarding their views on determining the validity of church practices? How did this difference impact the Protestant Reformation?
2. Who was John Calvin, and what role did he play in the Protestant Reformation? What were his major contributions or accomplishments? Who was John Knox, and what was his role in the formation of the Presbyterian Church?
3. What was the significance of Calvin's Institute of the Christian Religion? Why is this book particularly important to the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions?
4. How did Dr. Doug Rumford, a pastor in the Presbyterian Church of America, characterize Presbyterianism? Would you agree with this general characterization? Why or why not?
5. What is the meaning of the word *Presbyterian*, and what does this teach us about the Presbyterian Church?
6. What are the five distinctive beliefs of historic Presbyterianism known by the acronym **TULIP**. Do all Presbyterians today hold fast to these ideas? Where do you agree and disagree with these ideas?
7. Compare and contrast a conservative understanding of the doctrine of God's sovereignty with a more moderate understanding of this doctrine. On what point (or points) might Calvinists and non-Calvinists be likely to agree?
8. What does it mean to say that God is sovereign in your life? How should this affect the way you live your life each day?