

# Sovereign Grace Series

## Lesson #1 Introduction to the Sovereign Grace Series <sup>2001</sup>

### Amplifying Attachments for Lesson #1

Files #s	Title
2000-3	Bibliography for this Sovereign Grace Series
0664-	Feeding Sheep or Amusing Goats by C. H. Spurgeon
1391	1858 Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Abstract of Principles

### I. What is the Purpose of This Class?

1. To provide a true picture of the nature and implications of God’s Sovereign Grace (a.k.a. “Calvinism”)
2. To clarify, explain, and answer all questions asked by students about this great doctrine as it relates to God’s redemptive glory!
3. To use a flexible schedule of these 12 lessons to allow a full discussion of the issues between Sovereign Grace (Calvinism) and Arminianism.

### II. What is Sovereign Grace?

A. Sovereign Grace is a doctrine of salvation (soteriology). It is often called “Calvinism” which is not entirely correct in that Calvinism is more correctly understood to be a whole system of doctrines in all areas of theology that represent what John Calvin taught. If one does not hold to all of Calvin’s theology, it would be more correct to use the more generic term of Sovereign Grace which is Calvin’s beliefs regarding the nature of God’s salvation of His elect saints.

Epistemology	Theology	Anthropology	Christology	Pneumatology	Soteriology	Ecclesiology	Eschatology
How do we know?	Who is God?	What is the nature of man?	Who is Jesus the Christ?	Who is the Holy Spirit?	How is man saved from sin?	What is the Church?	What is God’s plan for the future?
<b>General Agreement with John Calvin’s Theology?</b>							
<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No!</b>	<b>No!</b>

B. The term “Sovereign Grace” is used because this is a term that describes the essential nature of the Doctrines of Grace rather than being named after a specific theologian or theology. The essence of this meaning is that God administers His grace towards humans sovereignly and in accordance with His own will and His own purpose. Another term that can be used to describe this view of soteriology is Monergism. (vs. Synergism)

1. Monergism teaches that God (the Trinity) acts alone and sovereignly in the matter of individual salvation.
2. Synergism teaches that God depends on humans acting in cooperation with God in the matter of individual salvation.

### III. The Conflict Between Arminianism and Sovereign Grace Regarding Human Autonomy

This course is largely a study of the theological logic and/or illogic of and comparison of:

- Calvinism (Sovereign Grace) – Historically Orthodox in belief.
- Arminianism – Although orthodox in belief (not a heresy), we consider this view to be a serious error.
- Modern Arminianism – Not orthodox in belief, but rather a modern heresy of the church in some of its popular forms. These beliefs would cause Jacob Arminius to roll over in his grave if he heard what was being taught and preached in many “evangelical” churches today under the moniker of “Arminianism”.

Historically Baptists have been predominantly “Calvinists” and largely “Reformed”. Consider the London Baptist Confession of 1689\* and the SBC Abstract of Principles of 1858<sup>1391</sup>. Charles Spurgeon would have been largely “Reformed”, but in the mid to late 1800s, many Baptists became dispensational pre-millennialists in their eschatology. Particularly in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, most Baptists became dispensational pre-millennialists

in their belief, while at the same time moving away from their old Calvinism. It is interesting to note that most “Arminian” Baptists still hang on to a remnant of their old Calvinism (Sovereign Grace) by believing in the security of the believer (a.k.a. Perseverance of the saints), which real Arminians do not believe in. We will cover these things in great detail in our Lesson #12 Perseverance of the Saints, the last lesson of our series.

***Discuss Procuring a copy of the London Baptist Confession of 1689!***

#### IV. What is Meant by “Sovereign Grace”?

A. When we speak of “Sovereign Grace”, we are speaking of doctrinal views that have been elaborated throughout the history of the Church and that are clearly taught throughout Scripture. These views are also known as “Augustinianism”, “Calvinism”, “Reformed”, or the “Doctrines of Grace”. The term “Sovereign Grace” eliminates confusion regarding the tendency to assume that a “Calvinist” believes all of the teachings of John Calvin, including his views on eschatology, ecclesiology, etc.

#### B. Technical Terms and Concepts: *No Place for Sovereignty* by R. K. McGregor Wright (NPS\*)

Term/ Concept	Definition	Relevance/Need to Understand
Arminianism	“Protestant theology starting from the thought of Jacobus Arminius around 1580 in opposition to the Calvinism of the Dutch state church. Modifies the Reformation view of grace by compromising with freewill theory.” NPS* p. 233	Essential to understand the various theological view within Evangelicalism
Common Grace	The view that God is genuinely merciful to <b>all men</b> , generally preserving them from consistent sin and giving them life and good gifts they do not deserve. <b>Modified</b> from NPS p. 234	Both Arminians & Calvinists accept the concept of Common Grace towards all men.
Enlightenment	The secularizing intellectual movement away from the former Christian consensus that education should be based on the Christian revelation. Term coined to contrast with the supposed Dark Ages, when the universities were largely controlled by the church. NPS p. 235	The dark ages were not caused by the Church, but rather by various famines, pandemics, and barbarian invasions.
Humanism	A theory of human moral and intellectual competence apart from a supernatural revelation. Grew to dominate “western thought” during the Renaissance period. (14 <sup>th</sup> – 16 <sup>th</sup> century largely in Europe) NPS p. 24	Humanism is currently the greatest threat to widespread acceptance of the gospel message.
Rationalism	“Theory that the human mind can understand the world autonomously using reason to establish truth, apart from God’s revelation.” NPS p. 239	Rationalism is currently a great threat to the acceptance of the gospel message.
Syncretism	The perennial tendency of believers in every age to combine the unique blessings of Scriptural revelation with the vagaries of whatever currents of thought are happening to capture the popular imagination. NPS p. 14	Syncretism has throughout history corrupted mankind away from God’s truth!

#### V. Sequence of Upcoming Classes in this Sovereign Grace Series

In order to understand this strange doctrine of Sovereign Grace taught by Scripture it is necessary to prepare ourselves by having a clear understanding of a number of God’s attributes which are foundational to this great doctrine of God’s Sovereign Grace. Simplicity, Holiness, Transcendence, Immanence, Providence, Sovereignty, and Wrath. Our schedule of classes consists of the following lessons (2 through 12):

Lesson #	Lesson Title	Description
2	God’s Simplicity	An attribute that is foundational to an understanding of Sovereign Grace or Calvinist soteriology.
3	<u>God’s Absolute Holiness</u>	God is holy, meaning that He is set apart from and altogether different from man, from angels, from demons, from any created thing. He is not in any way common to any of His created orders.
4	<u>God’s Absolute Sovereignty</u>	God’s purpose in carrying out His will without any intervening possibility of failure regarding completion of His intentions and plans.

5	<u>God's Righteous Wrath Toward Sinners</u>	God's perfect, just, and righteous wrath toward those who sin against His perfect Law and sovereign command.
6	Arminianism & Calvinism Compared	TULIP is an acronym that outlines the key points of Sovereign Grace (Calvinism). TULIP was an attempt by Calvin's followers to respond to the Arminian Remonstrances which were developed by Jacob Arminius' followers. We will note the differences and the similarities.
7	What's Wrong with Arminianism?	A discussion of weaknesses in classical Arminianism and heresies of modern Arminianism.
<b>The "Tulip" Acronym</b> We will discuss its origins in Lesson #7		
8	Man's <b>T</b> otal <b>D</b> epravity	<b>Total Depravity:</b> The deathly nature of man in his fallen state. Man (&women) are totally incapable of relationship with God in this natural state into which they have been born.
9	God's <b>U</b> nconditional <b>E</b> lecting Purpose	<b>Unconditional Election</b> God's Predestination unto salvation of God's chosen in His electing grace before the foundations of the world.
10	Christ's <b>L</b> imited <b>A</b> tonement	<b>Limited Atonement</b> Jesus' 100% effectual atonement of people God has chosen for redemption before the foundation of the world.
11	The Holy Spirit's <b>I</b> rresistible Grace	<b>Irresistible Atonement</b> God's irresistible call to His Sovereign Grace. There is a universal "General Call" of the church to all men and women with no exceptions. God's call through the power of the Holy Spirit is always effectual.
12	The <b>P</b> erseverance of the Saints	<b>Perseverance of the Saints</b> God's preservation of the saints in faith unto salvation in order to accomplish God's sovereign purpose.

**Note:** Some of these lessons will take only one week. Some of these lessons will take several weeks. It is vitally important that students ask questions and that the class does not go on until the students understand the contents of the current lesson, it's broader implications, and that they feel confident that they understand what is meant by Sovereign Grace theology.

## VI. Why has the Church so Broadly Left this Theology of God's Sovereign Grace?

A. It is not just in recent years that the church has left this theology of God's Sovereign Grace. The early church left this doctrine, then later the Roman Catholic Church broadly left this theology of God's Sovereign Grace. The reformers rediscovered this Sovereign Grace theology with Luther, Calvin, Knox, the Puritans, the Pilgrims, and most early Protestant denominations, and the Baptist largely adopted this doctrinal position in the 1630s up until the late 1800s to early 1900s.

**Reference:** By His Grace and For His Glory, by Thomas Nettles

**Consider:** "This is simply the best book there is on the subject at hand. Dr. Nettles is a superb historian and he traces with careful attention to the sources the history of the doctrines of grace within the Baptist heritage. An important resource for reclaiming the past in service of a future shaped by the great tradition of (John) Bunyan, (Benjamin) Keach, (Andrew) Fuller, (William) Carey, (Charles) Spurgeon, (James) Boyce and (B. H.) Carroll."  
By **Dr. Timothy George**, Dean of Beeson Divinity School.

B. There is a particular sequence of the destruction of orthodox Christian Churches into heresy as described by the description of the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22. This sequence is well observed throughout many movements within historical Christianity.

**The Historical Sequence of Apostasy:** Generally continuously present throughout Church history!!!

Orthodox Sovereign Grace soteriology: God's work of redemption is entirely His sovereign work in redeeming His elect



Arminianism: Salvation becomes a work of God and man. God can do no salvation apart from man's autonomy. **A serious error!**



Arianism: Jesus Christ is not eternal as the Father, but was created by the Father, not equal to or of the same nature as. **A heresy!**



Socinianism: Jesus is not eternal, reject doctrine of original sin, man's free will trumps God's omniscience, atonement is not substitutionary in nature, Jesus became the Christ figure upon his birth to Mary and Joseph. **A heresy!!**

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Deism: Jesus is not God or a god, but rather an enlightened, rational man. God is transcendent, but not immanent. **A heresy!!!**

### C. The Problem Statement Regarding Modern Arminianism:

During the second Great Awakening in America, Charles G. Finney, a heretic evangelist, (considered great by most Arminians) deeply misled the “evangelical” churches. “Finney’s new measures were tremendously influential. Even down to our own day, whole denominations are enmeshed in the established traditionalism of revivalist preaching methods. Its present fruits were indicated by a survey of the 350,000 baptized in Southern Baptist churches in 1993: the Home Missions Board reports that more than half cannot be found now by the churches that reported the baptisms. Only nine percent of the adults responding to the survey said they joined the church for spiritual reasons.”

**R. K. McGregor Wright; *No Place for Sovereignty*; p. 34 – published 1996**

“In Isaiah 40-66 there is a more general and all-encompassing concept of an idol that is implied in the prophet's extended diatribe against idolatry. In its most general form, an idol is anything erected by the sinner to stand alongside the God of the Bible to keep him at bay, to limit him in some way within his own creation, to keep him in his place. This place is always a place of convenience designed by his compromised worshipers from which God can be recalled into acting at their philosophical or political whim, without threatening their basic presumption of **autonomy**. It functions as a humanly chosen reference point, a competing origin of meaning and integration, so that human freedom to oscillate between preferred "relative absolutes" is preserved. In this way claims can continue to be made on a history that is forgotten, and a theological tradition can be appealed to while its content is being progressively abandoned. In this way Christian terminology can be used just as it was in the old days, with the words now given new meanings in conformity with the latest syncretism. The search for a workable syncretism between Christianity and heathenism would itself make a fine idol for an enterprising thinker. Historically, it often has.”

**R. K. McGregor Wright; *No Place for Sovereignty*; p. 216**

D. My charge to you in this course is to challenge yourself to seriously consider what Scripture says about God’s Sovereign Grace.

**Obey Romans 12:1-2** *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. <sup>2</sup>And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.***

### **Some Important Quotations**

The creeds of Christendom are not expressions of Christian experience. They are summary statements of what God has told us in his Word. Far from the subject matter of the creeds being derived from Christian experience, it is Christian experience which is based upon the truth contained in the creeds; and the truth contained in the creeds is derived from the Bible, which is the Word of God.

**J. Gresham Machen; *Here We Stand*; by James M. Boice & Benjamin E. Sasse; Ch 3 by Albert Mohler; p.66**

The secularization of mainline Protestantism and the dominant theological academy is evident in the evisceration of the Christian truth-claim at the hands of theologians and church leadership. Virtually no doctrinal essential has been left untouched, no truth left intact, no creed or confession defended against compromise. Increasingly - in the name of pluralism, tolerance, inclusivity, and sensitivity - all that is solid appears indeed to melt into air.

**Albert Mohler; *Here We Stand*; by James M. Boice & Benjamin E. Sasse; p. 62**

I am afraid of an inward disease which appears to be growing and spreading in all the Churches of Christ throughout the world. That disease is a disposition on the part of ministers to abstain from all sharply-cut doctrine, and a distaste on the part of professing Christians for all distinct statements of dogmatic truth. - - Let no scorn of the world, let no ridicule of smart writers, let no sneers of liberal critics, let no secret desire to please and conciliate the public, tempt us for one moment to leave the old paths, and drop the old practice of enunciating doctrine - clear, distinct, well-defined and sharply cut doctrine - in all utterances and teachings.

**John Charles Ryle in 1903; from *Contending for Truth in Here We Stand*; p. 68 & 69**