

What Does It Mean That God Is Sovereign?

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R. C. SPROUL

What Does It Mean
That God Is Sovereign?

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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Chapter One

God's Sovereignty over Nothing

The title of this opening chapter might cause confusion. God's sovereignty over nothing? Doesn't that suggest that there is nothing over which God is sovereign? But surely God's sovereignty extends over everything. To find out what we mean by "God's sovereignty over nothing," we must go back to the beginning, to Genesis 1:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and

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darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. (Gen. 1:1–7)

And so the text of Genesis continues, day by day, segment by segment, expressing the transcendent mystery of all mysteries: the creation of all things by a sovereign God. Augustine of Hippo described this as a work accomplished *ex nihilo*, out of nothing.

It might be easy for us to say that God creates *ex nihilo*, but to conceive of this work of creation is beyond our

intellectual capacity. The first element, the idea of nothing, is beyond our ability to comprehend. What is nothing?

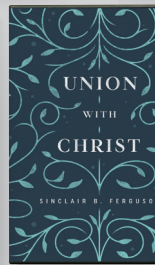
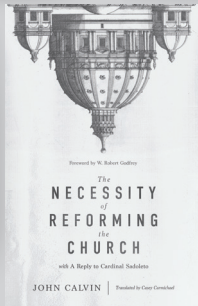
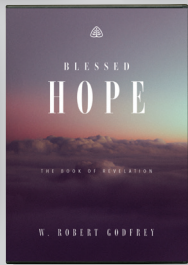
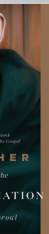
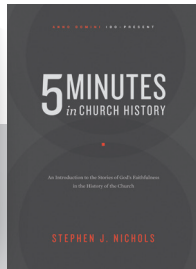
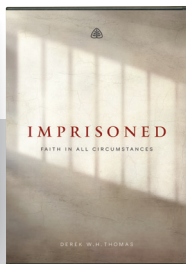
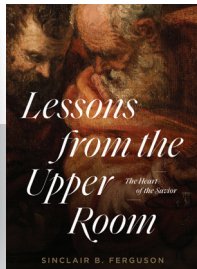
It's nothing. The problem with nothing is that when we say, "There is nothing," we are speaking nonsense because the verb *is* is a form of the verb *to be*, and the one thing that nothingness lacks is "*be*-ness." So, we can't speak of nothingness, and we can't say, "There is nothing" or "There was nothing," because to say that there *is* such a thing as nothing would be to attribute something to it, when *nothing is not*.

When we speak of *nothing*, we are using a word that functions as a type of definition that has a rich history in theological and philosophical investigation: the way of negation. The way of negation is a method of definition by which we define something not by stating positively what it *is* but rather by using negative language to say what it is *not*.

In theology, we use the way of negation all the time. When we say, for example, that God is infinite, what are we saying? He's not finite. When we say that God is immutable, we are saying that He is not given to change and mutation.

When we talk about *nothing*, we are using the way of negation and making a distinction between *something* and

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