

Sovereign Grace or Abundant Grace?

From time to time, and more so recently, I have come across the term “**sovereign grace.**” It is used in the names of some churches and ministries. Sovereign grace is a byword of Calvinists—how they view that grace is dispensed. Something about the term “sovereign grace” did not seem to ring true, so I did a search of the Scriptures, looking up *sovereign* and *grace*. The following is what I discovered.

The words *sovereign* and *sovereignty* are not found once in the Bible. This does not mean that the Bible does not teach the sovereignty of God – it just does not use that word, just like the Bible does not use the words *missionary* or *trinity*, yet these concepts are taught in Scripture. Webster defines **sovereign** as “above or superior to all others; supreme in power; independent of all others.” God truly is sovereign, as He states, “*I am God, and there is none else; I am God, made there is none like me ... saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure ... I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it*” (Isaiah 46:9-11).

The word *grace* is found 163 times in the Bible, and its forms *gracious* and *graciously* are found 33 times and 5 times respectively. **Grace** is defined as “the unmerited love and favour of God to undeserving sinners; God giving us that which we do not deserve.” I did a search of the 201 references of *grace* and its forms to see what words were associated with it. Words such as found, find, give, given, giveth, shewed, gift, gifts, freely, bestowed, abound, abundant, abundance, sufficient, and exceeding are connected with grace: showing that grace flows from God’s benevolent nature. Only one time is grace associated with God’s sovereign nature (Exodus 33:19). God delights giving grace, “*Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:16). God’s grace is sufficient (II Corinthians 12:9); yea, it is exceeding abundant (I Timothy 1:14). God has more grace than we could ever need or use.

My suspicions were verified. To accurately reflect the Biblical use of the grace of God, we should not use the term sovereign grace, but **free, abundant grace**. You may wonder, “Why do Calvinists like to use the term sovereign grace?” I suspect that it is because of the mindset of the Calvinist – teaching Christ did not die for everyone (limited atonement) and that most are predestined to eternity in Hell (unconditional election). “Sovereign grace” carries the connotation of limited or restricted grace. I’m thankful that God is “*not willing that **any** should perish, but that **all** should come to repentance*” (II Peter 3:9), and that “*the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto **all** men*” (Titus 2:11). Amazing grace, abundant grace, how sweet the sound! If some should ask if we are a sovereign grace church, we can tell them “**we are much more than that; we are an abundant grace church!**”

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