



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

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Volume XI
Issue 267

The Sovereignty of God

Part 1

by – George Addair

To think that this work will be approved by the general public is a foolish expectation. The trend of the centuries has consistently been that of the exaltation of man and the abasement of God. The intensive research for this study seems to indicate that this trend has been due to the inability of men to reconcile the free will of man with the sovereignty of God. Consequently, scholars seem to have been sidetracked into thinking that God has neglected His universe, by choice of course. They feel that the Creator has delegated His rule and authority to the use or abuse of the creature. They have reduced God and His Divine office to the extent that multitudes of people now have only a superficial conception of Him.

OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Causalism

Causalism exchanges the providence of God for chance. This theory indicates that the daily events of life are the result of mere chance or accident. Because of the obvious inability to explain the cause of certain events, it is held that these events happened as results of accumulated circumstances rather than as the result of a governing force behind them.

To those who uphold this theory, we offer this reply. It is logical to acknowledge the fact that events do happen which cannot be explained today; but rather than attribute these occurrences to chance, we believe that God arranged these

occurrences. Those who are familiar with the tremendous amount of Scripture on this subject are well aware that words such as "luck," "accident" and "chance" are nothing more than the revelation of human ignorance. These words are used to justify or to explain something which cannot be understood, and the student of Scripture should be careful in his usage of these terms.

To lean completely upon chance implies that there is no design to the world. The order and design of the laws governing the universe demand that it was planned and organized. For every event there is a cause. It is completely unreasonable to believe that all of the wonders of our universe are the result of chance or accident.

General Providence

This theory teaches that God created all things. He then established laws to govern these things, leaving them to be governed by His established laws. In other words, God chose to limit His activity in the universe. This view is expressed by most people who believe that the world is operated by the free will of man, and that the destiny of man is in the hands of man himself. Basically, this view teaches that God intervenes only in the so-called "big things," and that He is uninterested in the "little things."

This view was often taught by philosophers. Cicero said, "Even in kingdoms among men, Kings do

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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SOVEREIGNTY (continued from front page)

not trouble themselves with insignificant affairs.” Jerome thought it absurd that God should know just how many gnats and cockroaches there were in the world.

It is not uncommon to hear similar statements today. In the minds of most people, there dwells the idea that the small details of life are fully controlled by the free will of man. It is uncommon to find those who believe that the Sovereignty of God reaches into the realm of the minutest affairs of people. We must urge against this theory with the following arguments:

General control over the course of history and nature is impossible without also the control of the smallest parts of the picture. Nothing great has great beginnings. Care for the chain is care for the individual links of it. Take care of the pennies, and the dollars will take care of themselves. The flight of pigeons to the southwest changed Columbus’s course from Virginia to the West Indies. The breeze warps the course of the bullet. The worm perforates the plank of the ship. God must care for the least or He does not care for the greatest.

The love of God prompts care for the least as well as the greatest. In the language of love, there is nothing trifling or beneath the notice. Therefore, Infinite Love must notice even the minutest things.

God, who is interested in our welfare throughout the ages, is also conscious of even the number of hairs on our heads. He knows when a sparrow falls from the air. The Creator of all things has a definite interest in the things which He created.

DEFINITION OF COMPLETE SOVEREIGNTY

The Sovereignty of God is the key to History, the interpreter of Providence, and the foundation of Bible interpretation.

By the Sovereignty of God, we mean the supremacy of God. We mean His Kingship and Headship. It literally means, “the Godhood of God.” To

declare that God is sovereign is to declare that He is God. It is to declare,

That He is the most high, doing according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him, “What doest Thou?” (Daniel 4:35).

To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He,

Is the Mighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psalm 115:3).

To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is,

The Governor among the nations (Psalm 22:28).

He sets up kingdoms, overthrows empires, and determines the course of dynasties as pleases Him best.

To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is,

The only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of Lords (I Timothy 6:15).

Such a God is revealed in the pages of the Sacred Scriptures. However, God is not described as such in modern times. The God currently presented to people is practically helpless. He is presented as an effeminate being who commands the respect of no really thoughtful person. Even from the pulpit, the preacher presents God as one who should be pitied rather than one to be respected. I heard one preacher, when describing the state of affairs on earth today say, “Poor God!” The message proclaimed in most churches today implies that God has failed because mankind has rejected Him. Few people seem to realize that He is working **ALL THINGS** according to His Own will (Ephesians 1:11).

God cannot fail. He is not to be pitied, but to be praised. It is often said that, "God is doing His best to save mankind." If this be so, then He will succeed. To say that God is trying to save all people, and then to proclaim that all will not be saved, is to admit that God has failed. This in itself implies that God is not all powerful, nor is He perfect. To say that Satan is preventing many from being saved is to indicate that Satan is accomplishing that which God cannot do, that Satan is more successful and powerful than God. To say that the stubbornness of man prevents him from being saved is to say that man has thwarted the will and efforts of God. God cannot fail. He cannot begin a project without seeing it completed. He cannot design a plan only to have it defeated by some other agency, whether it be natural man or supernatural Satan. He cannot, even in the smallest sense, realize failure in that which He attempts to do.

To declare that sin entered the Garden of Eden and caught God by surprise is to dethrone God. This is to reduce him to the level of finite man. Then, to declare that sinful man has the power and ability to defeat God's plan of salvation and reconciliation is to exalt man to the place where he can checkmate God. God is absolute, irresistible and infinite. He governs all of the universe as He pleases. He has the right as Creator to mold the clay into whatsoever shape He desires. He is under no rule or law outside of His Own nature. He is a law unto Himself. He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to anyone. Sovereignty is characteristic of the whole being of God.

THE EXERCISE OF HIS POWER

God is sovereign in the exercise of His power. He works all things according to His will. Observe this vivid illustration: The nation of Israel had been in bondage for hundreds of years in Egypt. Moses was sent by God to lead the Israelites from Egypt to the land of promise in Palestine. The ensuing events reveal a feeble attempt of Pharaoh to interfere with the plan of God, so consequently God stretches forth His hand in power to judge the land of Egypt with numerous plagues. The Words

of God indisputably proclaim that the demonstration of power shown here was for the express purpose of showing His power to the earth. Referring to Pharaoh, God says,

For this cause have I raised you up, for to show in you My power; and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth (Exodus 9:16).

This power turned water to blood and light to darkness. It exercised full control over man and beast, life and death, and the forces of wickedness and good. Other Scripture to confirm this truth is found in Exodus 32:11, Deuteronomy 4:37 and II Kings 17:36. These verses, along with many others, clearly refer to the power of God.

Yet, on the other hand, an event occurred which reveals an entirely different purpose of God. Not long after the dramatic deliverance of Israel from Egypt, these same people find themselves under attack by the Amalekites. Did God put forth His hand to spare Israel and judge the Amalekites? He did not! He rather decreed that He would,

Have war with Amalek from generation to generation (Exodus 17:16).

Why did God deal differently with the Amalekites and the Egyptians? Simply because it suited His plan. No other answer can be given, for in each case it is revealed that the intent of God was fulfilled completely.

Not many years after this great exodus from Egypt, Israel enters the land of Palestine. The first city approached by them was Jericho. This city fell entirely to the Israelites by the power of God. His people did not lift one hand in battle. Yet we find not another city fell in that manner. All of the others were taken by the sword, and in some cases Israel suffered defeat. Why the distinct difference? Because it suited the plan of God.

Some of the more familiar stories of the Bible reveal the Sovereignty of God in a very colorful manner. David is given victory over the giant Goli-

ath. Daniel is delivered from the hungry lions. The three Hebrews are delivered from the hot furnace of fire. Yet the Bible declares that all of the servants of God were not shown such favor. Hebrews 11:36-37 declares,

Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, moreover of bonds and imprisonments: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.

Why were some tormented and others delivered? Why was Stephen stoned to death and Peter delivered from prison? The only answer is that God is sovereign in the exercise of His power. He operates the universe as it best suits His plan.

THE DELEGATION OF HIS POWER

God is sovereign in the delegation of His power to others. He allowed Methuselah to possess a vitality which enabled him to outlive all of his contemporaries. Imparted to Samson was strength which no other human being possessed. Israel was given the ability to be wealthy,

But you shall remember the Lord your God: for it is He Who gives you power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18).

These basic illustrations serve to show that God exercises full control over the delegation of His power to others.

THE EXERCISE OF HIS MERCY

Mercy is an adorable attribute of God. It prompts Him to shower His grace on all of His creation. Due to the consequences of sin no one is entitled to mercy, since true justice demands punishment for sin. However, God does exercise mercy, but according to His Own wishes. A striking contrast in the exercise of His mercy is seen in the experience of two men: Moses, for only one act of disobedience, was denied his request and was sen-

tenced to death.

The Lord is wroth with me for your sakes and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me "Let it suffice you" (Deuteronomy 3:26).

Moses was not permitted to enter the promised land. Rather, he died just prior to the entry of Palestine. His request for a reprieve was denied. On the other hand, let us notice the experience of Hezekiah:

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Set your house in order; for you shall die, and not live.'" Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, saying, "I beseech You, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before You in truth and with a perfect heart and have done that which is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept sore, and it came to pass before Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him saying, "Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears: Behold, I will heal you: on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. And I will add unto your days fifteen years"'" (II Kings 20:1-6).

Both of these men had the sentence of death pronounced on them. Both prayed earnestly for a pardon. The Lord answered one and gave him an "additional" fifteen years. The other said, "The Lord ... would not hear me."

What an example of Romans 9:15!

For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Another striking example of the sovereign exercise of the mercy of God is revealed in John 5:3-9.

During one of the feasts of the Jews, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem. He came to the pool of Bethesda, where lay “a great multitude” of impotent folk, blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. Among all of those present there was a certain man which had been afflicted for 38 years. Out of all of those who needed to be healed, Jesus chose this one man. There is no indication that the man asked Jesus for anything. Yet he was singled out and healed. The Sacred Scriptures abound with illustrations to demonstrate that the mercy of God is exercised in a way that is known only to God Himself.

THE EXERCISE OF HIS LOVE

A man can receive nothing except it be given him from Heaven (John 3:27).

This of course includes love. The controversial passage of Romans 9:13 testifies to this fact with great impact,

Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

Many objectors declare that the original word for “hated” is not literally “hate” as we know it. If this be true, it still reveals a distinction between God’s feeling for Jacob and Esau. We feel that God’s love encompasses the universe, but in order to execute His plan for the universe it is essential that He use His sovereign will in the exercise of His love, just as it was necessary that He choose Jacob over Esau.

THE EXERCISE OF HIS GRACE

Grace is the unmerited favor of God; a favor that is undeserved and unearned. None are entitled to it. It is a free gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). If none are entitled to it then none can demand it. The fact that God displays it to some and withholds it from others reveals His sovereign exercise of this virtue.

Sovereign grace is illustrated throughout the Scriptures. The Gentiles are left to walk in their own ways while the Jews are given the Scriptures

(Ephesians 2:11-12; Romans 3:1-2). The Jews are chosen to be above all people on earth (Exodus 19:5). Ishmael, the firstborn, is cast out while Isaac, the younger, is made the child of promise. Esau, the generous hearted and the forgiving spirited is denied the blessing while Jacob, the thief, is the recipient of the inheritance and is fashioned into a vessel of honor.

In the New Testament, truth is hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes. Pharisees and Sadducees are left to go their own way while harlots and publicans are drawn to God by cords of love. The glorious Son of God was born in a lowly manger, adored by shepherds, and exposed to poverty.

It is futile for man to attempt to comprehend the Sovereignty of God. Of all of the illustrations cited, it is doubtful that man would have responded as God did, even in a single case. This is not surprising, for Isaiah 55:8-9 indicates that man does not think as God does:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts.”

It is our prayer that the references to Scripture have served to give you a fair definition of the Sovereignty of God. It means simply that God is God, and that He is

Working all things after the counsel of His Own will (Ephesians 1:11).

SOVEREIGNTY IN CREATION

For in Him is all created, that in the heavens and that on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or sovereignties, or authorities, all is created through Him and for Him, and He is before all, and all has its cohesion in Him (Colossians 1:16-17).

This expansive description of the creative work of the Lord Jesus Christ is breathtaking. Ascribed to Him is the existence of all things, and furthermore the endurance of all things is fully under His control. A close scrutiny of the Scriptures reveals that they offer no information about conditions prior to creation. Divine revelation begins with “time” and ends with “time.” Eternity is not a Scripture theme. There was an existence of God before time began, and with our limited reasoning powers, we will now look into that pre-creation period.

In the great expanse which stretches behind Genesis 1:1, the universe had not yet been born. He could create anything He desired. He might execute it this way or that way, or He might choose not to create at all. He could create one world or one billion worlds. He is omnipotent, and it has always been His nature to “*work all things after the counsel of His Own will.*” In this pre-creation state, He could choose to create one creature or one billion creatures. He could choose to place them all on an equal basis or He could design a different status for each, none of them having anything in common with the other. No one could challenge His right to do just as He pleases ... for nothing yet existed.

If He chose to, God could have created a universe so infinitely large that its dimensions could never be grasped by the human mind. Or, He could have created an organism so small that the most powerful instrument of science could not detect it. He could create certain creatures whose existence would endure throughout the ages, or He could create insects that would die within the hour they were born. He could create the lofty angels or He could create the lowest reptiles. He could create the huge heavenly bodies revolving in space, or He could create the minute atom.

Who was there to challenge His sovereignty? It is quite apparent that He accomplished exactly what He desired to do, for He is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), and omnipresent (present everywhere), and nothing yet existed that could offer interference or influence. The testimony of Scripture and common sense

indicate that He created everything just as He wanted it to be.

THE UNIVERSE

Observe some of the phenomena of His creative work. In the air we see birds flying. In the water we observe the fish. What makes them to be different? It was God who assigned them to their places. Turn your gaze toward the limitless expanse of the heavens.

But a different glory, indeed, is that of the celestial, yet a different [glory is] that of the terrestrial, another glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for star is excelling star in glory (I Corinthians 15:40-41).

Why should the sun hold a different glory than the other heavenly bodies? Why are there such amazing inequalities? One answer adequately explains this,

Because of Your will they were, and are created (Revelation 4:11).

The planet earth is a supreme example of this truth. It is said that two-thirds of our planet is covered with water. The remaining one-third has huge areas that are unfit for habitation. Why? Why should one country be more fit for life than another? Why is one barren and the other extremely fertile? Why is one rich in minerals and the other void of them? Why does one have a healthy climate and the other unsuitable? Why is one saturated with lakes and rivers and the other a barren desert? Why is one plagued with earthquakes and volcanoes and the other free from them? Why all the difference? Simply because God designed it so.

THE ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE KINGDOMS

It is very interesting to observe the limitless contrasts of the animal kingdom. Notice the difference between the lion and the sheep, the bear and the cat, the elephant and the mouse. The

horse, dog, and other animals possess great intelligence while others are labeled dumb and stupid. Some animals are destined to be beasts of burden while others are free. Some are fit for food and others are unfit. Some are very beautiful, while others are ugly. Some have great strength while others are helpless. Some are fast while others can scarcely crawl. Some are valuable and others are worthless. Some are capable of living for hundreds of years and others live only for hours. Some are wild and fierce while others are tame. Why the difference? Because God willed it to be.

SOVEREIGNTY IN CREATION

Why should roses have thorns and lilies be without them? Why should some flowers have a fragrant aroma and others have none? Some bear wholesome fruit and others poisonous fruit. One can endure frost and another cannot. Some bear flowers several times annually while others bloom only once every 100 years.

Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven and in the earth, in the seas, and all the deep places (Psalm 135:6).

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for “deep” as written by David is *t’hôm*. This word is comparable to the word “abyss” which is the proper rendering for the bottomless pit of Revelation 20:3. This certainly associates it with Satan. It is comforting to know that God did as He pleased not only in heaven and in earth, but in the realm of the evil one also. It is sad to see so many thousands of churches and ministers teaching that Satan is operating outside of the will of God, when the Bible teaches that God is doing His will in every realm, including Satan’s.

THE ANGELIC CREATURES

God’s sovereign pleasure is also displayed in the heavenly realm. Some of the angelic creatures are of higher rank than others. Some are more powerful than others. We have the arch angel, seraphim, cherubim, principalities and powers of Ephesians 3:10; rulers of darkness of Ephesians 6:12; elect angels of I Timothy 5:21; and others. Why the difference? God has a use for each, of course. Psalm

115:3 says,

Our God is in the heavens, He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased.

THE HUMAN FAMILY

Humanly speaking, doesn’t it seem strange that God should give one person five talents and another only one? Many think it is unjust to see one born healthy and another sickly. Some have pondered over the fact that Cain, who was evil, was permitted to live a long life; while Abel, the righteous, was taken in youth. In spite of the problems faced by society, it is nonetheless true that some are born white and others of a different color. Why are some born idiots and others with the mentality of a genius? Why are some robust and full of energy while others are naturally lazy? Why are some naturally selfish while others are submissive and weak? Why are some natural leaders and others followers? The natural mind says that all of this is due to heredity and environment. Heredity and environment cannot account for all of these differences. Regardless, let us not forget that it was God Who designed the laws of heredity and environment.

*The Lord has made all things for Himself, yes, even **THE WICKED** for the day of evil (Proverbs 16:4).*

Those who oppose the absolute sovereignty of God should meditate upon this verse, for it declares that God even made *the wicked* and designates His reason for doing so. He is God, and He holds the absolute right to do all of these things. To murmur against Him is rebellion. To question Him is to impugn His wisdom. To criticize Him is rank sin. Let us not forget who He is. Isaiah declared in Isaiah 40:17-18,

***ALL** nations before Him are as nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will you liken God?*

(to be continued)