

## CHAPTER IX

# THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

### A. INTRODUCTION

#### 1. The essential required attitude of submission to God's sovereignty

From the outset, while this glorious attribute has resulted in both revival blessing and contention amongst sincere Christians, let it be pointed out that the resolution of such a controversy is to be found, not so much in reasoned understanding as in submission. The fundamental issue is whether a person will *yield* to God's inscrutable ways without demanding an answer to his every question.

- a. By way of illustration, in a sermon entitled, *God's Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men*, Jonathan Edwards declares:

Let us, therefore, labor to *submit* [emphasis added] to the sovereignty of God. God insists, that his sovereignty be acknowledged by us, and that even in this great matter, a matter which so nearly and infinitely concerns us, as our own eternal salvation. This is the stumbling-block on which thousands fall and perish; and if we go on contending with God about his sovereignty, it will be our eternal ruin. It is absolutely necessary that we should *submit* [emphasis added] to God, as our absolute sovereign, and the sovereign over our souls; as one who may have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and harden whom he will [Rom. 9:18].<sup>1</sup>

- b. The Book of Job likewise illustrates this principle. Although Job strenuously maintains his own righteousness, even to the point of accusing God, by implication, of wrongdoing (Job 40:6-8), yet to the very end he does not appear to receive from God an explanation concerning his sufferings and trials, including the role of Satan. What is it that causes Job's frustration, when unjustly and slanderously accused by his friends, to give way to submissive, humble resignation? It is not the vindication of Job's character, but the humiliation that results from an overwhelming description of God's transcendent ways, especially concerning His wisdom and sovereignty. Both the revelation presented by Elihu (Job 34-37), and supremely that of God Himself (Job 38:41), completely subdue Job to the point where his submission is unconditional. Consider that Job's problem is resolved, not so much by a logical explanation as his yielding to God's unimpeachable, holy omnipotence. "3 Then Job answered the LORD and said, 4 'Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II, p. 854.

to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. <sup>5</sup> Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; even twice, and I will add nothing more.” (Job 40:3-5). “<sup>1</sup> Then Job answered the LORD and said, <sup>2</sup> ‘I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. <sup>3</sup> Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. <sup>4</sup> Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me. <sup>5</sup> I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; <sup>6</sup> therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:1-6). The end result is reconciliation with God, and greater blessing and contentment than before (Job 42:10-17).

- c. The great argument of Paul in Romans 9:18-20 finds its resolution, not in a factual, reasoned explanation concerning a seeming paradox, an antinomy, but rather in the rightful submission of man, as a creature, to his sovereign Creator.
  - (1) Consider v. 18. “So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.” God’s unconditional sovereignty over the election of Israel, as well as man in general, is asserted according to His sole determination. He dispenses mercy and judgment with discrimination according to His own good pleasure that at the same time excludes the consideration of human merit. Man has no part in the determination of his eternal destiny. God’s action is unilateral toward Jacob and Esau, indeed before they were born! (Rom. 9:10-11).
  - (2) Consider v. 19. “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’” A strong objection is raised by an imagined opponent. If God is absolutely sovereign in determining our eternal destiny, then why award man with praise or blame as a respondent since he appears to have no autonomous choice or part in this matter? Therefore it is implied that man is not accountable for his actions and thus should not be chargeable with guilt. Why? Because God alone appears to determine man’s moral course. Hence, an explanation is demanded.
  - (3) Consider v. 20. “On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it?” In the following argument, a reasoned reply to v. 19 is *not* given. Rather, the creature is called upon as clay to submit to the Creator as the potter. Explanation by God is not necessary, even though we are sure that God is righteous in the perfection of His ways. Impudence on man’s part seems suggested here: Murray comments that the appeal here is to “the reverential silence which the majesty of God demands of us.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II, p. 31.

2. The basic contemporary importance of God's attribute of sovereignty.
  - a. A common objection to emphasis upon God's sovereignty is that we are unbalanced in stressing it. After all, should not all of God's attributes be taught with equal weight and emphasis?
    - (1) From the perspective of knowing all about God, that is with regard to the totality of his attributes, this is a valid point. There are those who lopsidedly enthuse and promote the sovereignty of God more than His other characteristics. They make right belief here to be a bench-mark in terms of qualifying for Christian fellowship. Yet we have already seen that God's attribute of holiness is of fundamental importance, even in terms of frequency of mention in the Bible. So from the outset we will readily confess to God being holy and righteous and good in His sovereignty.
    - (2) From the perspective of both the sovereignty of God and human responsibility, those who are eager to promote the former can, at the same time, be negligent in the promotion of the latter. There can be, in telling a sinner that salvation is a work of sovereign grace, a neglect in pressing home the invitation and responsibility to believe, even as the Bible does. Of course there can also be such an emphasis upon human responsibility in evangelism that the human decision is declared to be the controlling factor that even God cannot influence! Hence, in accord with biblical balance, consider that while in his encounter with Goliath David boldly proclaimed, "the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands" (I Sam. 17:47), yet he did not hesitate skillfully to employ five smooth stones as means by which the giant Philistine was slain" (I Sam. 17:40, 48-51).
    - (3) From the perspective of sin in this universe and its captive power or dominion, the vital question concerns its confrontation with God's sovereignty, and which realm of authority is triumphant. More particularly concerning man, having a degree of appointed autonomy while at the same time being thoroughly polluted, yet does the sovereignty of God extend over him in every way, particularly with regard to his salvation? This is a vital matter!
      - (a) Lucifer's desire was to be independently sovereign, to be equal with God: "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14). Will he autonomously prevail? The Bible emphatically denies such a possibility, even though it has to be admitted that mystery abounds here. The origin of sinful rebellion here can only be acknowledged as a secret matter (Deut. 29:29). Yet God, while including this within the "all things" (Eph. 1:11) of His

permissive will nevertheless retains the moral impeccability of His Person and holy will.

- (b) At the Garden of Eden, the serpent's appeal to Eve was that she and Adam would be as their Creator: "For God knows that in the day you eat from it [the forbidden fruit of the tree of life] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). There was probably an element of slander in Eve's suggestion here. Does she really know what God knows? Nevertheless the sovereignty of God will also prevail over this rebellion (Gen. 3:15).
- (c) Hence, while fallen man may be jealous of many of God's attributes, e.g. omniscience, yet it is that perfection of sovereignty that he especially craves for, that is sovereign autonomy apart from God. He may concede that God is, yet he craves for uninterrupted solitariness, especially in terms of being able to do what he likes without moral repercussions.
  - 1) Consider Psalm 2:1-3. "<sup>1</sup> Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? <sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, <sup>3</sup>Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!" Here the nations feverishly plan to break away from God's moral fetters, to cast aside His cords of sovereign restraint. In particular, there is frantic opposition to God's "Anointed Messiah" (Luke 19:14; Acts 4:25-27).
  - 2) By way of application, in young and old alike there is that inclination by nature to shed the restraining ties of God's sovereign righteousness. "Thus says the LORD to this people, 'Even so they have loved to wander; they have not kept their feet in check. Therefore the LORD does not accept them; now He will remember their iniquity and call their sins to account.'" (Jer. 14:10). Sinful mankind is racially prodigal. Yet God is sovereign and able to save a rebel like Paul (Gal. 1:13-16).
- (4) By way of illustration, Arthur Pink, in devoting a whole book to the subject of God's sovereignty, defends his focus on this one attribute.

Probably 95 per cent. of the religious literature of the day is devoted to a setting forth of the duties and obligations of men. The fact is that those who undertake to expound the responsibility of man are the very writers who have lost 'the balance of truth' by ignoring, very largely, the Sovereignty of God. It is perfectly right to insist on the responsibility of man, but what of

God? - has He no claims, no rights? A hundred such works as this are needed, ten thousand sermons would have to be preached throughout the land on this subject, if "the balance of truth" is to be regained. The "balance of truth" has been lost, lost through a disproportionate emphasis being thrown on the human side, to the minimizing, if not the exclusion, of the Divine side. We grant that this book is one-sided, for it only seeks to deal with one side of the truth, and that is the neglected side, the Divine side.<sup>3</sup>

- b. The sovereignty of God is of far-reaching importance insofar as other doctrines and activities are concerned.
  - (1) *God and man.* Is man autonomous in relation to God, that is independent, especially in terms of his having free will that God will not influence? Or does God have full authority over man that includes his sinful intellect, will, emotions, and ultimate destiny?
  - (2) *Salvation.* Is it a cooperative, bilateral work between God and man that is especially reliant on a human faith decision? Or is it a totally sovereign, unilateral work of God upon man, dead in trespasses and sins, that grants repentance and faith, indeed salvation in total?
  - (3) *Sanctification.* Is Christian growth a collaborative work that maintains a decision for salvation by means of ongoing obedience? Or is it a collaborative work between the Christian and his keeping Savior that results in a secure salvation?
  - (4) *Church life and growth.* Does God have no hands but our hands so that the building of local churches depends on energetic human activity and astute methodology? Or does God build and add to His church in conjunction with faithful, biblically directed human labor?
  - (5) *Witnessing.* Is it man campaigning for a dependent God, employing proven formulas, so as to capture decisions and hence souls, like scalps? Or is it God declaring his saving power, through man, in such a manner that His effectual gospel is glorified?
- c. The sovereignty of God is especially fundamental insofar as the practical manifestation of the Christian life is concerned.
  - (1) It elevates our conception of God to a glorious level, which is productive of hope, confidence, worship, reverence, humility. Even the Son of God, in

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, p. 11.

His prayer recorded in John 17, addressed His Father as “holy” and “righteous” (John 17:11, 25). He attributed His ability to perform His astonishing works to His Father (John 5:19, 30; 8:28; 14:10).

- (2) It repudiates salvation by works in any form, so that the believer is continually encouraged to walk with holy boldness under a canopy of preserving sovereign grace, not the possibility of salvation being forfeited (Rom. 8:31, 38-39). It is the sovereign power of God in creation that also brings a saving knowledge of Christ to darkened hearts (II Cor. 4:6).
- (3) It guarantees the triumph of good over evil, both in my own life as a believer as well as in the world as a whole. While a present enveloping cloud of moral darkness increasingly engulfs humanity, yet “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom. 5:20). Even Satan was subject to the sovereignty of God (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6).
- (4) It results in greater Christian maturity along with consequent assurance. This arises from appreciation that if God is able to save a sinner from Satan’s domain of darkness, He is able to keep saving that individual (I Cor. 1:18). “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).
- (5) It produces a genuine confidence in authentic biblical witnessing, both in the fields of evangelism and missions. It is the sovereign authority of Jesus Christ that assures the certainty of divinely ordained fruitfulness. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” (Matt. 28:18-20).
  - (a) In evangelism, representative are the ministries of John Bunyan, George Whitefield, Edwards, C. H. Spurgeon, Asahel Nettleton, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, etc., all of whom were believers in the sovereignty of God in evangelism.
  - (b) In missions, representative are the ministries of David Brainerd, William Carey, Henry Martyn, Adoniram Judson, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, George Muller, etc., all of whom were believers in the sovereignty of God in missions.

### 3. The controversy surrounding God's attribute of sovereignty.

The contentious nature of God's attribute of sovereignty also needs to be kept in historical perspective. It may surprise and quieten us when we discover exactly what notable and esteemed saints of the past believed, and even more importantly, why they believed it!

#### a. John Wesley and George Whitefield.

For a time there was a sharp division between John Wesley and George Whitefield over the sovereignty of God. Wesley's Arminianism was at odds with Whitefield's Calvinism! However, reconciliation did eventually take place so that Wesley preached in London on November 18, 1770, a very affectionate memorial sermon following the death of Whitefield in Massachusetts; his text was Numbers 23:10, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Certainly God was pleased to bless the ministries of both men. However, this is not to suggest that the doctrinal issues involved were of little significance. For this reason, the following doctrinal exposition makes a decided commitment, not simply to the perspective of Whitefield, but rather to that predominant and expansive historic understanding of God's sovereignty declared by Augustine, Tyndale, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Owen, Goodwin, Bunyan, Charnock, Manton, Henry, Edwards, Carey, Ryle, Spurgeon, Warfield, Machen, Pink, Lloyd-Jones, Packer, etc.

#### b. C. H. Spurgeon.

In 1890, only two years before his death, C. H. Spurgeon proclaimed that he was certainly not immune from the antagonism of those who were averse to his straightforward preaching on the sovereignty of God. He boldly confesses:

I have known men bite their lip and grind their teeth in rage when I have been preaching the sovereignty of God. . . . The doctrinaires of to-day will allow a God, but he must not be King: that is to say, they choose a god who is no god, and rather the servant than the ruler of men. We, however, declare on God's behalf, that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy"; and at the sound of this doctrine they stamp their foot with rage. They would rob God of his crown, and leave him neither throne, nor will. This will not do for me; my heart delights to say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." Whatsoever is *his* pleasure shall by *my* pleasure. Even if the Lord condemn me, I cannot say that he is unjust; but if he hath mercy upon me, I must ascribe it wholly to his free and sovereign grace. Rob not God of his sovereignty; but rejoice that the Lord reigneth and doeth as he wills.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, XXXVI, p. 416.

## c. Hyper-Calvinism.

This deviance from the biblical standard, a going beyond what the Bible teaches concerning God's sovereign, electing grace, has manifested itself in two ways. First there is that emphasis, often born of new discovery, that must speak the truths of Calvinism at every breath, that relishes the slaughter of any hint of Arminianism, that cannot broach a biblical topic without zeroing in on the "five points," and that sniffs "freewill-ism" at every hand. Second there is that stifling, hyper-rationalistic limitation of evangelism which not only denies the free offer of the gospel, but also the warrant of unbelieving man in general to believe since he is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). Iain Murray succinctly states the problem, as Spurgeon vigorously opposed it, as follows: "These, then, are the four main points at which Spurgeon disagreed with Hyper-Calvinism - [1] its restriction of gospel invitations, [2] its failure to treat the word and promises of God as sufficient warrant for faith, [3] its minimizing of the place of human responsibility, [4] and its denial of any love in God except love to the elect."<sup>5</sup>

## 4. The scriptural doctrine of God's sovereignty at a glance.

- a. *Psalms 33:8-11*. "<sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. <sup>9</sup> For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. <sup>10</sup> The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. <sup>11</sup> The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation."
- b. *Isaiah 46:9-11*. "<sup>9</sup> He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire. <sup>10</sup> Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. <sup>11</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah" (cf. Isa. 14:24-27; 43:11-13; 44:24-25).
- c. *Daniel 4:34-35*. "<sup>34</sup> But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup> All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"

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<sup>5</sup> Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*, p. 99. For a more historical description, refer to Peter Toon, *The emergence of hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689-1765*.



- d. *Luke 10:22*. "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."
- e. *John 6:37, 44, 65*. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. . . . No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. . . . <sup>65</sup>And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."
- f. *Acts 2:22-23, 47; 4:27-28; 13:48*. "<sup>22</sup> Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup> this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" (cf. 2:47; 4:27-28; 13:48).
- g. *Romans 8:28-30*. "<sup>28</sup> And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified" (cf. Rom. 9:6-24; 11:33-36).
- h. *I Corinthians 1:26-31*. "<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; <sup>27</sup> but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, <sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no man may boast before God. <sup>30</sup> But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the LORD.'"
- i. *Ephesians 1:3-12*. "<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, <sup>4</sup> just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup> He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace <sup>8</sup> which He lavished on us. In

all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him <sup>10</sup> with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him <sup>11</sup> also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, <sup>12</sup> to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory."

- j. *II Thessalonians 2:13-14*. "<sup>13</sup> But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. <sup>14</sup> It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- k. *II Timothy 1:9-10*. "[God] who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, <sup>10</sup> but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel," (cf. II Tim. 2:24-25).

## B. GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER ALL THAT COMES TO PASS (ORDINATION)

1. By way of definition, it is common for God's sovereignty and omnipotence to be understood interchangeably. However, Charnock plainly describes an important distinction between these two terms.

Omnipotence is his [God's] physical power, whereby he is able to do what he will; dominion is his moral power, whereby it is lawful for him to do what he will. Among men, strength and authority are two distinct things. A subject may be a giant, and stronger than his prince. . . . As God is Lord, he hath a right to enact; as he is almighty, he hath a power to execute. His strength is the executive power belonging to his dominion. In regard to his sovereignty, he hath a right to command all creatures; in regard to his almightiness, he hath power to make his commands be obeyed, or to punish men for the violation of them. His power is that whereby he hath a right to subdue all creatures under him.<sup>6</sup>

- a. God's omnipotence is His absolute power as the Almighty "Once God has spoken; Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God." (Ps. 62:11; cf. Ps. 91:1-4; Isa. 40:28).

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, II, p. 407.

- b. God's sovereignty is His rightful dominion over all that is undergirded by His omnipotence. "[O LORD] Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations (Ps. 145:13; cf. Dan. 4:3, 34-35).
  2. The "decree of God" is that term given to describe His determination, the expressed declaration of His sovereignty, concerning all things, according to His eternal and wise purpose.
    - a. *The First London Confession Of Faith* (Second Edition), published by seven Baptist congregations in 1646, declares: "God hath decreed in Himself, before the world was, concerning all things, whether necessary, accidental or voluntary, with all the circumstances of them, to work, dispose, and bring about all things according to the counsel of His own will, to His glory: (Yet without being the author of sin, or having fellowship with any therein) in which appears His wisdom in disposing all things, unchangeableness, power, and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree (Isa. 46:10; Eph.1:11; Rom. 11:33; Ps. 115:3; 135:6; 33:15; I Sam. 10:9, 26; Prov. 21:6; Exod. 21:13; Prov. 16:33; Ps. 144; Isa. 45:7; Jer. 14:22; Matt. 6:28, 30; Col. 1:16-17; Num. 23:19-20; Rom. 3:4; Jer. 10:10; Eph. 1:4-5; Jude 4, 6; Prov. 16:4)."<sup>7</sup>
    - b. *The Westminster Confession Of Faith* (Presbyterian) published in 1647, declares in Chapter III: "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 11:33; Heb. 6:17; Rom. 9:15, 18); yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin (Jas. 1:13, 17; I John 1:5; Eccl. 7:29), nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established (Acts 2:23; Matt. 17:12; Acts 4:27-28; John 19:11; Prov. 16:33)."<sup>8</sup>
3. The evidence of Scripture for God's all-encompassing decree.
  - a. The definitive passage is Ephesians 1:11 where God, "predestined [us, the elect, redeemed, vs. 4, 7] according to His purpose, [πρόθεσις, prothesis, cf. v. 9] who works all things after the counsel/advice [βουλή, boulē, Acts 4:27-28; Heb. 6:17] of His will [θέλημα, thelēma, 1:9; 5:17; Gal. 1:4]" Other passages include Isaiah 14:26-27; 46:9-11; Daniel 4:35.
  - b. By way of explanation, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments on Ephesians 1:11:

No-one suggested to God that it might be good to do this or that. It was not only not suggested to Him by anyone else, it was not even suggested to God, as some

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<sup>7</sup> *The First London Confession Of Faith*, 1646 Edition, pp. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, III, p. 608.

have supposed, by reason of His foreknowledge whereby He saw that certain people were going to think and do certain things, in consequence of which His own thoughts were determined. Such an idea is a complete denial of what the Apostle teaches here. Everything is according to the counsel of His own will. He thought with Himself, He deliberated and meditated with Himself [in Triune relations]. The whole plan of salvation from beginning to end is exclusively of God, with nothing at all from the outside. Everything originates in God, everything comes out from God. I said at the beginning that we were considering high doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

c. The characteristics of God's decree.

- (1) It encompasses such terms as "plan" (Isa. 14:26-27; Acts 2:23), "purpose" (Jer. 4:28; Acts 4:28), "counsel" (Jer. 23:18; Eph. 1:11), "good pleasure" (Is. 53:10), "kind intention" (Eph. 1:5, 9), "ordinances" (Ps. 119:91), "statutes" (Jer. 31:35; 33:25).
- (2) It is known by His revelation in part, even progressively, but not in total. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." (Deut. 29:29; cf. Eph. 1:9).
- (3) It is especially related to certain other attributes.
  - (a) *God's holy and gracious decree.* "[God] who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (II Tim. 1:9).
  - (b) *God's eternal decree.* "This [mystery] was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11; cf. Is. 46:9-10).
  - (c) *God's immutable decree.* "For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6; cf. Job 23:13).
  - (d) *God's wise decree.* "O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your possessions." (Ps. 104:24).

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<sup>9</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose*, p. 227.

## (4) It is inclusive of:

- (a) *Stability of the physical universe.* “<sup>89</sup> Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. <sup>90</sup> Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations; You established the earth, and it stands. <sup>91</sup> They stand this day according to Your ordinances, for all things are Your servants” (Ps. 119:89-91).
- (b) *Circumstances of the nations.* “And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26).
- (c) *Length of human life.* “Since his [man’s] days are determined, the number of his months is with You; and his limits You have set so that he cannot pass” (Job 14:5).
- (d) *Good acts of men.* “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph. 2:10; cf. Isa. 44:28).
- (e) *Evil acts of men.* “<sup>27</sup> For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:27-28; cf. Gen. 50:20; Prov. 16:4, 9; Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; Rom. 9:17; Rev. 17:16-17).
- (f) *Means as well as ends.* “<sup>13</sup> But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (II Thess. 2:13; cf. Rom. 10:17).

## 4. The evidence of reason for God’s all-encompassing decree.

By its very nature, design, as so obvious in the universe, calls for a designer. So a designer must surely employ creative purpose, that is the creation of divine blueprints according to rational conception, and thence the call for manufacture.

- a. A. A. Hodge comments, “If one event is decreed absolutely, all events must therefore be determined with it. If one event is left indeterminate, all future events will be left in greater or less degrees indeterminate with it.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 205.

- b. Loraine Boettner comments, "It is unthinkable that a God of infinite wisdom and power would create a world without a definite plan for that world. And because God is thus infinite His plan must extend to every detail of the world's existence."<sup>11</sup>

5. Common objections to God's all-encompassing decree.

In other words, the complaint here is essentially concerned with the question as to whether God is in total control of man's destiny, or he retains a measure of independence, which realm, God chooses not to invade. The bottom line is about man being desirous of determining his future; he wants a say in his earthly career. He will allow God alongside of him, so to speak, but he objects to God being over him, even as the Bible portrays this relationship. So now consider this plea, even as expressed in Psalm 2:3. "Let us [the nations and the peoples] tear their [the Father and the Son's] fetters apart and cast away their [restrictive, moral] cords from us."

a. God is made to be the chargeable author of sin.

- (1) Yes, sin must be included in God's decree. "The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil." (Prov. 16:4; cf. Isa. 5:7). No, it is impossible for God to be the chargeable author of sin. "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5; cf. Jas. 1:17). Hence God's permission for sin to exist as a result of creaturely activity must be distinguished from his holy and good pleasure. "In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways" (Acts 14:16). "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:29-30; cf. Num. 11:4-6, 18-20. 31-34; Ps. 78:27-31; 106:15).
- (2) Whether one's doctrinal conviction is Calvinistic or Arminian, the origin of sin is ultimately a mystery, even if we probe back of Adam and delve into the initial angelic fall. It seems best by far to declare this difficulty to be an antinomy or paradox (where two seeming opposite propositions are true in God's reality) concerning God's sovereign decree that allows sin while His holy character remains unimpeachable. This is more reasonable, concerning transcendent truth, than the proposal that man has a God-given, untouchable freedom and autonomy which in fact turns out to be an abdication by God of His sovereignty.

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<sup>11</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 20.

- (3) Berkhof comments, "For good and holy reasons He [God] renders these sinful acts certain, but He does not decree to work evil desires or choices efficiently in man. The decree respecting sin is not an efficient but a permissive decree, or a decree to permit, in distinction from a decree to produce, sin by divine efficiency."<sup>12</sup>
- (4) Other aspects of sin to be remembered are:
  - (a) Sin has existed as a theoretical opposite as long as God has existed. "For God knows that in the day you eat from it [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5).
  - (b) Sin allows God to demonstrate His grace, without in any way excusing sin in this regard. So darkness accentuates light. Paul alludes to this reality. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be!" (Rom. 6:1-2).
  - (c) God is sovereign over sin, both with respect to its present dominion and its future banishment. "<sup>17</sup>For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. . . . "<sup>21</sup>So that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 5:17, 21; cf. Rev. 20:7; 21:1-8).
- b. Man is properly restricted as a free, moral agent.
  - (1) The question of man's freedom in relation to God's sovereignty is dealt with more specifically later in this chapter. However, at this point it is imperative that man's freedom be understood as being under God rather than independently alongside of God. Man's freedom is real, without external coercion, but as we shall see, like all realms of freedom, even that of God, it is circumscribed. This means that man's freedom as a sinner within the pig-pen of his nature, is at the same time bordered by the restriction of divine righteousness. In all of this man, as free, is constrained by sovereign decree. He is ever free under God, but never free from Him.
  - (2) Berkhof comments that the Bible
 

clearly reveals that God has decreed the free acts of man, but also that the actors are none the less free and responsible for their acts (Gen. 50:19-20; Acts

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<sup>12</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 108.

2:23; 4:27-28). It was determined that the Jews and Gentiles should bring about the crucifixion of Jesus; yet they were perfectly free in their wicked course of action, and were held responsible for this crime. There is not a single indication that the inspired writers are conscious of a contradiction in these matters. They never make an attempt to harmonize the two. This may well restrain us from assuming a contradiction here, even if we cannot reconcile both truths.<sup>13</sup>

### C. GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER CREATION (ORIGINATION)

1. The majestic proclamation of Genesis 1:1 should be sufficient in itself to establish God's unqualified dominion over the work of His hands—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

- a. By force of logic, the Creator rules absolutely over His creation.

- (1) The creation owes its existence solely to God. Hence every creature is subject to the Creator's unqualified reign over His handiwork; its existence is purely of the grace of its Creator; it has no rights nor can it have demands since the Creator is lord over all.
- (2) The creation did not cooperate with or consent to the work of the Creator. "4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, 5 who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it?" (Job 38:4-5).
- (3) The creation will never be equal to its Creator. Such a postulate presents an absurdity since, by its very nature and in terms of existence, the Creator is not dependent on the creature. Rather the Creator is ever the sovereign who governs over His subjects.
- (4) The creation is dependent upon its Creator. The creature received life and breath from his Creator; he is not self-pepetuating but rather ever dependent upon the source of his being. For the creature to rebel against this order (Rom. 1:25) is ultimately a hopeless cause (Ps. 2:4-6).

- b. Thus Charnock comments:

When God himself makes an oration in defense of his sovereignty, his chief arguments are drawn from creation (Job 38:1-41; Ps. 89:11-12; 95:3-5; Isa. 44:21; Acts 17:23-28). The sovereignty of God naturally ariseth from the relation of all

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 106.



things to himself as their entire creator, and their natural and inseparable dependence upon him in regard of their being and well-being. . . . As soon as ever anything began to be a creature, it was a vassal to God as a lord. Every man is acknowledged to have a right possessing what he hath made, and a power of dominion over what he hath framed.<sup>14</sup>

- c. Further Scripture support includes Psalm 33:6-9, “<sup>6</sup> By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. <sup>7</sup> He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. <sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. <sup>9</sup> For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (cf Neh. 9:6; Ps. 33-6-9; 148:1-6; Isa. 42:5-6; 45:18; Mal. 2:10; Rev. 4:11).
2. Reason also tells us that if God did not create something, whether by direct or indirect means, then that something has an inherent independence from God that challenges His sovereignty. However, if God did create everything, then He is totally sovereign, unless He relinquishes part of His sovereignty, in which case He is no longer fully sovereign. Some suggest that God has indeed given away part of His sovereignty to man, allowing him to be autonomous and beyond divine interference. However, we suggest that this results in God ceasing to be fully God over all.
  3. What response then should this foundational truth produce in man?
    - a. The profoundest humility, as with Job. “What can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. . . . I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 40:3-5; 42:1-6). This is born of a yielding to God’s unqualified, rightful reign over His total creation.
    - b. The strongest aversion to any suggestion, especially evolutionary theory, that this universe is a product of mindless chance plus eons of time. This universe has its origin in the mind of God, not mindless matter
    - c. The sobering reality of man’s inescapable accountability before God, that is in full harmony with His sovereignty. “That which is known about God is evident, . . . His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen” (Rom. 1:19-20).

#### D. GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER PROVIDENCE (PRESERVATION)

1. God’s providence is His “provide-ence,” that is His government, administration, sustenance and maintenance of all of His creation. “Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like a great deep. O LORD, You preserve man

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<sup>14</sup> Charnock, *Works*, II, p. 411.

and beast" (Ps. 36:6). "<sup>14</sup> He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the labor of man, so that he may bring forth food from the earth, <sup>15</sup> and wine which makes man's heart glad, so that he may make his face glisten with oil, and food which sustains man's heart."

a. For God to create, but not to preserve and maintain, is to give grounds for the charges of negligence and indifferent concern, especially with regard to His creation which He designated, with divine satisfaction, as being "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The result would be a creation that gives way to dismay and despair since it can have no confidence in succor from its Creator.

b. Arthur Pink asks us to ponder a world void of God's continuing government.

Suppose that God created the world, designed and fixed certain laws (which men term 'the laws of nature'), and that He then withdrew, leaving the world to its fortune and the outworking of these laws. In such a case, we should have a world over which there was no intelligent, presiding Governor, a world controlled by nothing more than impersonal laws - a concept worthy of gross Materialism and blank Atheism. . . . If there is nothing more than the laws of Nature regulating the wind, then, perhaps tomorrow, there may come a terrific tornado and sweep everything on the surface of the earth to destruction. What assurance have we against such a calamity?<sup>15</sup>

c. So for John Calvin, if God is Creator, He is also indivisibly the "everlasting Governor and Preserver—not only in that he drives the celestial frame as well as its several parts by a universal motion, but also in that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the last sparrow [Ps. 84:3]."<sup>16</sup>

d. When Jesus Christ was accused of breaking the Sabbath because he healed a sick man on that day, he gave the astounding reply, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working" (John 5:17). In other words, just as the Father continues to administer and direct His creation, even on the Sabbath, so the Son of God jointly administers the universe, "upholding all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3), even on the Sabbath with acts of mercy (John 5:1-10).

2. Hence, God sovereignly cares for His creation with the same executive power that brought all things into existence. Further, His sovereign government at all times incorporates those perfections of righteousness, goodness, and wisdom. For Strong, this sovereign administration may be described according to various categories, as follows:<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Pink, *Sovereignty of God*, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I:XVI:1.

<sup>17</sup> Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 421-5.

- a. God's general providential government over His creation.
- (1) *Over the universe at large.* "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all" (Ps. 103:19; cf. Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11).
  - (2) *Over the physical world.* "6 Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. 7 He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain, Who brings forth the wind from His treasures" (Ps. 135:6-7; cf. 104:10-22; Nah. 1:3-).
  - (3) *Over the brute creation.* "26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?" (Matt. 6:26; cf. Ps. 104:21-28; Matt. 10:29).
  - (4) *Over national affairs.* "He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away" (Job 12:23; Ps. 22:28; Dan. 4:17, 34-36).
  - (5) *Over man's birth and destiny.* "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1:5; cf. I Sam. 16:1; Ps. 139:16).
  - (6) *Over outward successes and failures.* "6 For not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the desert comes exaltation; 7 but God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another" (Ps. 75:6-7; Luke 1:52).
  - (7) *Over the small and seeming accidental.* "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD" (Prov. 16:33). "But the very hairs of your head are numbered" (Matt. 10:30).
  - (8) *In the protection of the righteous.* "For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD, You surround him with favor as with a shield" (Ps. 5:12; cf. Ps. 4:8; Rom. 8:28).
  - (9) *In the supply of the saint's needs.* "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19; cf. Gen. 22:8, 14).
  - (10) *In ordering answers to prayer.* "32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:32-32; cf. Is. 64:4; Matt. 6:8).

- (11) *In the exposure and punishment of the wicked* "<sup>5</sup> The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates. <sup>6</sup> Upon the wicked He will rain snares; fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup" (Ps. 11:5-6; cf. 7:12-13).

b. God's particular providential government over the actions of men.

- (1) *Over men's free acts.* "And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians" (Ex. 12:36). "<sup>13</sup> Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' <sup>14</sup> Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that'" (Jas. 4:13-15; cf. I Sam. 24:18; Ps. 33:14-15; Prov. 16:1; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1; Jer. 10:23; Ezek. 36:27; Phil. 2:13; Eph. 2:10).
- (2) *Over men's good acts.* "<sup>23</sup> The steps of a man are established by the LORD, and He delights in his way. <sup>24</sup> When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong, because the LORD is the One who holds his hand." (Ps. 37:23-24; cf. Isa. 44:28; Eph. 2:10).
- (3) *Over men's sinful acts.* "<sup>11</sup> For this reason God will send upon them [unbelievers] a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, <sup>12</sup> in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." (II Thess. 2:11-12; cf. II Sam. 16:10; 24:1; Rom. 11:32). This government may be further understood as:
- (a) *Preventative*, that is concerning the restriction of sin. "Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I will be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression" (Ps. 19:13; cf. Gen. 20:6; 31:24; Hos. 2:6).
- (b) *Permissive*, that is concerning the allowance of sin. "<sup>11</sup> But My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. <sup>12</sup> So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices." (Ps. 81:11-12; cf. Is. 53:4, 20; Hos. 4:17; Acts 1:16; Rom. 1:24; 3:25).

- (c) *Directive*, that is concerning the ordering or channeling of sinful acts. "After the morsel, Satan then entered into him [Judas]. Therefore Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly.'" (John 13:27; cf. Gen. 50:20; Ps. 76:10; Isa. 10:5; Acts 4:27-28).
  - (d) *Determinative*, that is concerning the limitation of sinful acts. "Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.' So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD." (Job 1:12; cf. 2:6; Ps. 124:2; I Cor. 10:13; Rev. 20:2-3).
- 3. For the child of God, great comfort and confidence is derived from this truth. Concerning earthly children, they gain great contentment and assurance from having confidence in the certain supply of everything necessary for their health, protection, development, and enjoyment of good family life. However it is the wisdom of the parent that governs all of this and not the craving of the child.
  - a. To Noah and his descendants was given the promise of regularity concerning seasons and the availability of food. "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22).
  - b. To David was given the assurance that, "<sup>25</sup> I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread. <sup>26</sup> All day long he is gracious and lends, and his descendants are a blessing" (Ps. 37:25-26).
  - c. To the disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is given the promise of providential care as a son, in both the material and spiritual realms.
    - (1) Concerning his earthly needs of food, drink, and clothing he has been sovereignly promised. "Seek first His [the Father's] kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).
    - (2) Concerning his heavenly blessings, he has been sovereignly promised, through Paul, that "my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

## E. GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER REDEMPTION (SALVATION)

## 1. Introduction.

- a. Thus far, our study of God's sovereignty over the realms of creation and providence has probably not generated sharp or heated disagreement. However, now that we commence a study of God's sovereignty with regard to man's salvation, history indicates that a different prospect awaits us. The plain fact is that within the range of all of God's attributes, no aspect of His being is more liable to produce controversy than that of His sway and dominion over the salvation of man. In some instances, the problem here is simply that of ignorance on the part of the Christian, and, upon sound instruction, he readily embraces the biblical truth concerning this aspect of God's sovereignty. With other professing believers, either rationalism or even pride restrict understanding. Of course it can be depended upon that the unbeliever will vigorously oppose this teaching since it challenges his desire for independence.
  - (1) Religious men in general will readily confess God's absolute sovereignty in creation. After all, by force of logic, when God first created He must have been totally sovereign since He alone was present. But why does religious man become disturbed when confronted with God's sovereignty over him as an individual in the present? Is it not that the truth of God's dominion threatens his claim to autonomy, personal determination, sovereignty?
  - (2) Further consider, why is it that modernists and liberals within Christendom, in general, never give serious place to a high view of God's sovereignty in salvation? They may align with a historic tradition yet in no way profess personal belief in the faith of their fathers. Could it be that, at its roots, modernism and liberalism, having a naturalistic, humanistic mindset, represent a revolt against God's sovereignty over man (Ps. 2:1-3)?
- b. To help avoid uneasiness at this stage, the following introductory points are to be thoughtfully considered.
  - (1) Remember that God's sovereignty must not be divorced from His other attributes, especially those with a moral quality. Hence, he has a sovereignty that is regulated by His holiness, a sovereignty that is regulated by His goodness, and a sovereignty that is regulated by His grace. His sovereign activity is always with integrity.
  - (2) Remember that this truth involves sovereign and rightful dominion over man, and not simply raw, indiscriminate omnipotence before man. This being so, the terms of salvation are His to determine; man as a sinner has

absolutely no grounds for appeal except grace and mercy. Though God's salvation of man, formerly good, was yet certainly prospective (Gen. 3:15).

- (3) Let God be supremely God, while acknowledging human limitation. Seek to understand sovereignty through His eyes, His perspective as the Creator and sustainer of all. Desire His vindication, especially on account of His jealousy for His glory. Acknowledge the precedence of His absolute rights over the vainly proclaimed rights of man.
- (4) Seriously consider the doctrine of man as a sinner. To what extent is he captive to inherited and actual sin? If man is thoroughly polluted, what effect does this have on his every desire and choice? Consider man's focus on God through spiritually defective sight. Does fallen man as a race have any true desire for God and His glory?
- (5) Maintain an open mind concerning the Word of God. Be ready to learn something new. Pray for understanding: "[LORD] open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law [instruction] (Ps. 119:18)." George Rawson has wisely written:<sup>18</sup>

We limit not the truth of God  
To our poor reach of mind,  
By notions of our day and sect,  
Crude, partial, and confined:  
No, let a new and better hope  
Within our hearts be stirred;  
The Lord hath yet more light and truth  
To break forth from His Word.

## 2. The sovereignty of God over the *condition* of man.

- a. His state of innocence (uncontested holiness). In the garden of Eden, to begin with, man happily yielded to the sovereignty of God, He most likely manifesting Himself as a spiritually substantial theophany.
  - (1) Man's original righteousness, happiness, and dominion, were not self-generated, but wholly God's bestowal. So He also bestowed Adam with limited dominion while he yet remained under God's absolute dominion. "26Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our

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<sup>18</sup> The inspiration for these lines by George Rawson probably comes from John Robinson who, in giving a parting exhortation to the Pilgrim Fathers about to sail in the *Mayflower* from Leyden in 1620, declared, "He was very confident that the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy word." Hugh Martin, ed., *The Baptist Hymn Book Companion*, p. 217.

likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" (Gen. 1:26). 2:16). Further there was God's bestowal also of a wide range of sustenance from the trees of the garden (Gen. 2:16). All of this was God's endowment.

- (2) Yet God maintained His dominion over man by giving him a level of freedom that was never independent of God. It was a freedom involving responsibility and accountability. The actions of this freedom, while never being grounded in God's direct causation, were yet never beyond His influence and determined outcome. "33The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD." (Prov. 16:33; cf. Gen. 50:20).
- b. His state of pervasive depravity (soul corruption). Upon the committal of sin, Adam and Eve desired to distance themselves from God (Gen. 3:8). At the same time God caused Adam and Eve to be at a distance from the Garden of Eden and Himself (Gen. 3:23-24). With the role of the serpent also in view here, God is in full command of the whole situation. He is sovereign in the judgment of the serpent (Gen. 3:14-15) as well as Adam (Gen. 3:17-19).
- (1) Man's original sin and unrighteousness were self-generated (Gen. 3:17), and thus inherited by the whole human race. "12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned [in Adam?]. . . . 19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous." (Rom. 5:12, 19).
  - (a) This depravity is comprehensive (Rom. 3:10-18). Paul proceeds to prove from several Scripture quotations, beyond any doubt, that man is thoroughly polluted by sin, "that both Jews and Greeks are all under/in captivity to sin" (Rom. 3:9). Two aspects of this pervasive pollution of man are now given.
    - 1) Inherited human soul disease is extensive, vs. 10-12. "10 As it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one; 11 there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; 12 all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.'" Here human pollution extends to all of humanity without exception.
    - 2) Inherited human soul disease is intensive, vs. 13-18. "13 Their *throat* is an open grave, with their *tongues* they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their *lips*; 14 whose *mouth* is full of cursing and bitterness; 15 their *feet* are swift to shed blood, 16



destruction and misery are in their paths,<sup>17</sup> and the path of peace have they not known.<sup>18</sup> There is no fear of God before their eyes.'" Here human pollution extends to every part of a human being, that is the *throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet, eyes*.

- (b) This depravity is mortal. "<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. <sup>3</sup> Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." (Eph. 2:1-3; cf. Col. 2:13a).
  - (c) This depravity is debilitating "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6).
  - (d) This depravity is alienating "Remember that you [Gentiles] were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death" (Col. 1:21-22).
- (2) Yet God maintains His dominion over sinful man, indeed a polluted universe, with a salvation that is greater in every dimension. "<sup>18</sup> So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. <sup>19</sup> For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup> The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup> so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:18-21).
- (a) This salvation is comprehensive. It reaches to "men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9; cf. 7:9; 14:6). No crevice in which sin hides can escape its outreach.

- 1) Human soul salvation is extensive. It is "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16), that is "for all those who believe" (Rom. 3:22; cf. 4:11).
  - 2) Human soul salvation is intensive. "Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (II Cor. 4:16). "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature [species]; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (II Cor. 5:17). "God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).
- (b) This salvation is immortal. "<sup>53</sup> For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'" (I Cor. 15:53-54; cf. II Tim. 1:10).
  - (c) This salvation is regenerating. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. 1:3, 23; cf. Jas. 1:18).
  - (d) This salvation is reconciling. "<sup>18</sup> Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup> namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation." (II Cor. 5:18-19; cf. Eph. 2:11-16; Col. 1:19-22).
- (3) Yet God maintains His dominion over sinful man with a judgment that is equitable. "For He [the LORD] is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness." (Ps. 96:13; cf. Heb. 9:27).
- (a) He will justly save the repentant sinner. "<sup>25</sup> [God] passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Rom. 3:26).
  - (b) He will justly condemn the impenitent sinner. "<sup>1</sup> Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which

you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. <sup>2</sup> And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.” (Rom. 2:1-2).

- c. His state of righteousness (gracious justification and sanctification). Here is not only salvation by grace through faith alone, but rather sovereign grace whereby God actively regenerates, justifies, converts, and sanctifies. While man is responsive, yet this is according to divine encouragement and enabling.
  - (1) The justified sinner is judicially regarded as righteous for Jesus Christ’s sake. “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom. 4:5; cf. Phil. 3:9), yet he is to progressively attain practical righteousness using appointed means of grace. “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.” (Heb. 12:14; cf. II Pet. 3:18).
  - (2) The justified sinner is adopted, as a child through grace, into the family of God (Gal. 4:4-7; I John 3:1). As such he is expected to live actively, responsibly, that is to “watch and pray” (Matt. 26:41), to “walk” (Eph. 2:10; 4:1, 17), to “wrestle” (Eph. 6:12), to “be alert” (I Thess. 5:6), to “fight” (I Tim. 6:12), to “run” (Heb. 12:1).
  - (3) Yet God remains sovereign over His children, not only concerning their justification through the gift of faith (Acts 13:48; 16:14; Eph. 2:8-9), but also their sanctification, that is the cultivation and production of “the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:11).
    - (a) “*But by His doing* you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (I Cor. 1:30).
    - (b) “For we are *His workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus for *good works, which God prepared beforehand*, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).
    - (c) “Work out your salvation [outwardly express and manifest it] with fear and trembling; for *it is God who is at work in you*, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13).
- d. His state in eternity (either glory or gloom). Here is the solemn reality of God ultimately, sovereignly determining the destiny of human beings. On the one hand there are those unrighteous who believe and are dealt with solely according to pure grace in Christ, while on the other hand there are those

unrighteous who will not believe and consequently are dealt with according to righteous judgment.

- (1) The resurrection of life. There are “those who did the good [deeds] to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29a). Then the believer “will be like Him” (I John 3:2), that is conformable unto Christ’s glorious holy body
  - (a) The child of God shall inherit “glory” (Rom. 8:18, 29-30), “impeccable holiness” (Eph. 5:25-27; Jude 24), “completion/perfection until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6), “conformity with the body of His [Christ’s] glory” (Phil. 3:21), “entire sanctification” (I Thess. 5:23).
  - (b) *But* to Jesus Christ has been given sovereignty over the believer’s progress, even entrance through the gates of heaven. So according to evident “calling and choosing/election, . . . entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (II Pet. 1:10-11). Further, it is “the God of peace [who will] sanctify you entirely . . . at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess. 5:23; cf. Matt. 25:21, 23; John 1:2-3).
- (2) The resurrection of judgment. There are “those who committed the evil [deeds] to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29b). Then the unbeliever will have a form of spiritual materiality that is unlike the glory of Christ.
  - (a) The child of Satan shall inherit “outer darkness . . . [where] there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:30), “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:45-46), “torment . . . [and] agony” (Luke 16:19-26), “the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15).
  - (b) *But* to Jesus Christ has been given sovereignty over consignment through the gates of hell “<sup>41</sup> Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels’” (Matt. 24:41; cf. 7:21-23; 16:18; Luke 13:23-28).

### 3. The sovereignty of God over the *will* of sinful man.

- a. The limitations of human freedom. It is common for man to talk loosely, almost in absolute terms, concerning his supposed freedom. However any consideration of freedom must include limiting parameters.
  - (1) Contrary to popular opinion, man is not able to fulfill his boast, “I can do what I like.” Like a toddler in a play-pen, man only has freedom with

limits. Like a train set upon railway lines, man only has freedom to go in certain directions, and even more so when the rails have a rise or decline.

- (a) Man is not free to fly unaided, to walk on water, to live without sleeping, to regenerate lost limbs, to swim non-stop a thousand miles, to employ limitless mental acuity.
  - (b) He is not free in society to murder, to slander, to commit larceny, to be exempt from paying taxes, to break the law without consequences, to ignore civil responsibilities.
  - (c) He is not free to live as his innocent first parents, Adam and Eve. Why? Because his loss of innocence has rendered him captive to sin, like a man freely jumping into a pit is yet unable to escape from that same enclosure. Man is only free according to the bent of his character.
- (2) Even God is not absolutely free. "He cannot/is not able to deny Himself" (II Tim. 2:13). "God cannot be tempted by evil" (Jas. 1:13). "In Him there is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5). God is free to act only according to the parameters of His infinitely holy and immutable nature.
- (3) Freedom in man is primarily established according to the set of his nature and not the availability of real options. By way of illustration, place before a hungry lion the options of fresh red meat and a sumptuous chocolate cake and it will be evident that his nature quickly determines a clear preference for the meat, even though a most obvious option is present.
- (4) Which of the following four freedoms does man presently have?
- (a) Freedom as an agent without restraint by external, coercive forces? *Yes*, for man is not subject to outward constraint. He inwardly thinks and reasons according to the set of his brain, he originates free external acts such as speaking and walking.
  - (b) Freedom as a sinner by nature? *Yes*, in that man may freely choose within the arena of his sinful disposition between sinful alternatives. "Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin' (John 8:34). "<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, <sup>18</sup> and

having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." Rom. 6:16-18). In other words, unbelieving man only has the freedom of the pigsty from which he cannot extricate himself.

- (c) Freedom in a state of moral neutrality or equilibrium? *No*, since man as a sinner is not in a state of moral equipoise. He is biased in his moral being and inclined towards evil. Man's soul is polluted; his appetite is predisposed toward sin and ungodliness; he has no taste for God's righteousness, and in the smorgasbord of life he will never choose it, unless prompted to do so by particular prevenient/preceding grace.
  - (d) Freedom to conform with desire to God's standard of righteousness? *No*, if a man remains a child, by nature, of Adam and this world. But *yes*, if through conversion a person becomes a "new species" (II Cor. 5:17) since, "having been freed from sin, you became a slave of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18).
- b. The biblical perspective of human freedom. It is vital here that a person perceives man's liberty through the divine perspective, as God sees things. Concerning man's earthly claim of autonomy, we are told that "He who sits in the heavens laughs, the LORD scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury" (Ps. 2:4-5)."
- (1) Man's freedom *is always* under the sovereignty of God. Any attempt to claim autonomy or flee or rebel is wholly futile. "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?" (Ps. 139:7-12).
  - (a) Erroneous views concerning human autonomy (self-law) and freedom have led even evangelical Christians to declare that God regards the human will, assumed to be "free," as sacrosanct, untouchable, and beyond influence, except perhaps by means of intellectual persuasion. This is represented by a famous preacher's evangelistic appeal: "You come to Christ now. God cannot do any more for you. You must now choose Christ through an act of your will." Consider the Apostle Paul's conversion as to whether this is so (Acts 9:1-9; 22:6-10; 26:12-18; Gal. 1:13-16; I Tim. 1:12-17).
  - 1) It is to be expected that the unbelieving world will be quick to claim autonomy through "free-will." But when Christians uphold similar human autonomy, especially in the realm of evangelism, that is of the natural man having a state of moral neutrality with the ability to choose either good or bad, Christ or sin, then they

reflect a shallow understanding of man's thorough captivity to sin, his consequent impotence, and God's sovereignty.

- 2) It is claimed that for a response of faith and love toward God to be genuine, such a choice must be between at least two genuinely possible options, namely faith and love or unbelief and enmity. However, does God need this capacity for free-will in order that His love might be genuine? If this were the case then He must retain the real possibility of committing sin Himself through free choice, of the possibility of Him making an alternative "bad" choice, of reversal concerning His covenant promises through free-will. Of course this cannot be. However it is undoubtedly impossible for God to sin, yet there is no lack of genuineness in His acts of righteousness and love.
- (b) God's will does not merely operate alongside of man's will, but over it. God's will is accomplished whether man cooperates or not. Man's will must be subordinate to God's will or else God is not God. "You turn things around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, that what is made would say to its maker, 'He did not make me'; or what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He has no understanding'?" (Isa. 29:16; cf. Prov. 21:1; Is. 45:9; 46:8-11).
- 1) Yet God does not violate or abuse man's will. He does not force an unwilling man to enter heaven. Rather He draws and influences sinners with strong cords of grace and power, as with the conversion of Paul (Acts 9:1-9; Gal. 1:13-16). When a sinner's heart is converted, the unwilling becomes most willing.
  - 2) Even Satan has freedom. "Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (I Pet. 5:8). However it is freedom limited according to God's greater freedom and sovereignty over him, which Satan appears to acknowledge (Job 1:6-12).
  - 3) According to the Bible, God is fully sovereign *over* man. At the same time man has freedom *under* God, and thus is never free *from* God. To the child of God this is delightful truth; to the unbeliever this is insufferable constraint that must be opposed, like some wild kicking donkey (Job 39:5; Ps. 2:3).
- (2) Man's freedom *as a sinner is always* under the sovereignty of God. Notwithstanding the unbeliever's rejection of this truth, eventually with

the likes of Pharaoh (Gen. 9:27-28; 12:31-32; 14:26-28) and King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:29-37), humiliation is followed by admission that the hand of God cannot eventually be thwarted.

- (a) The Word of God describes the freedom of the man of this world as slavery to sin (John 8:34), concerning which only the sovereign grace of God can deliver him from. <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, <sup>18</sup> and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." (Rom. 6:17-18).
- 1) Fallen man has no innate capacity to will divine righteousness. <sup>44</sup> No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. . . . <sup>64</sup> But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. <sup>65</sup> And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.'" (John 6:44, 64-65; 8:34; cf. Rom. 5:6; I Cor. 2:14; Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:13).
- 2) Although the natural man "walks according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air," yet he is "dead in trespasses and sins," living "in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind. (Eph. 2:1-3). So Christ addressed a would be disciple, concerning his desire first to care for his father, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead" (Matt. 8:22).
- 3) By way of illustration, man has the freedom of the City of Destruction and Vanity Fair in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, while having no desire to set out on pilgrimage for the Celestial City. The swill of Satan's pigsty is preferable to God's green pastures (Ps. 23:2-3). Man is as incapable of purifying his sinful character as is the leopard of changing his spots or the Ethiopian the color of his skin (Jer. 13:23).
- (b) Man's only hope of salvation is for God to sovereignly, graciously, particularly effect a change of will from bondage to liberty. Those who believe in His [Jesus'] name, "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth" (Jas. 1:18; cf. Rom. 8:21; 9:16; Phil. 2:12-13).



- 1) He needs to be spiritually raised from the dead. “<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-10; cf. John 11:43).
  - 2) He needs to be spiritually reborn through regeneration. “<sup>5</sup> He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (John 3:3-8; Tit. 3:3-6).
  - 3) He needs the gift of repentance and faith. “<sup>24</sup> The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, <sup>25</sup> with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,” (II Tim. 2:24-25; cf. Luke 22:31-32; Acts 5:31; 11:18; 16:14; Eph. 2:8-9).
- (3) Man's freedom *as a Christian is always* under the sovereignty of God. This is the freedom for which man was originally created, that is liberty which happily subsumes under the dominion of God, the true libertarian. The parameters of this liberty are the revealed holy will of God, in which pasture real emancipation is enjoyed.
- (a) He has been set free from captivity to sin and now lives as a new man, temporarily residing in an old, crumbling shell of decaying flesh. “The creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21; cf. Rom. 6:6; 7:22; 8:15; II Cor. 3:16-17; 4:16; Gal. 2:4; 5:1, 13; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).
- 1) Being free, he yet experiences conflict with his body or vehicle of flesh. “We ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” (Rom. 8:23; cf. Rom. 7:24-25; Gal. 4:29; 5:17).
  - 2) Being free, he is both wedded and subject to Christ to the end that he might be fruitful. “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined [wedded] to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.” (Rom.

7:4). This subjection is obedience to the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9-14; Gal. 5:16, 25).

- (b) He shall be perfectly set free, living as a new man in a new and glorious, incorruptible body. “<sup>20</sup> For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; <sup>21</sup> who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” (Phil. 3:20-21; cf. I Cor. 15:51-54; II Cor. 5:2; Rev. 21:3-4).

c. The historic perspective on human freedom.

- (1) The following notable Christians have all held in common the biblical doctrine that the freedom of unregenerate man is limited to the sphere of his sinful nature. They deny that all men have an intrinsic capacity or autonomous freedom of will to respond to saving grace. They affirm that only sovereign, particular grace can save the individual sinner through the renewal of his soul and will.

- (a) Aurelius Augustine, 354-530 AD. Refer to his *Treatise on Grace and Free-Will*, and *The Enchiridion*, Ch. XXXII, where he inquires: “Why are we taught to pray for our enemies (Matt. 5:44), who are plainly unwilling to lead a holy life, unless that God may work willingness in them?” Works, IX, p. 199.
- (b) Martin Luther, 1483-1546. In his classic *Bondage of the Will*, the German reformer strenuously upholds the incapacitating corruption of the human will.

So you see [Erasmus] that free choice is completely abolished by this passage (Rom. 3:9-18), and nothing good or virtuous is left in man, since he is flatly stated to be unrighteous, ignorant of God, a despiser of God, turned aside from him, and worthless in the sight of God. . . . In short, the reign of Satan in men could not have been described in fewer or more expressive terms than by this saying that they are ignorant of God and despisers of God. That [is an omen of] betokens unbelief, it betokens disobedience, sacrilege, and blasphemy toward God; it betokens cruelty and lack of mercy toward our neighbor; it betokens love of self in all the things of God and men. There you have a picture of the glory and power of free choice!<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> E. Gordon Rupp, Philip S. Watson, eds., *Luther And Erasmus: Free Will And Salvation*, pp. 300-301.

Although he writes opposing the views of Erasmus, yet he thanks the Dutch humanist for raising such a vital issue since it touches the very nerve of the gospel of the grace of God.<sup>20</sup>

- (c) John Calvin, 1628-1688. Like Luther, the French reformer establishes that the true doctrine of sin reveals man to be a slave to his corrupt nature. Refer to his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II:II:1-27. "Man does not choose by reason and pursue with zeal what is truly good for himself according to the excellence of his immortal nature; nor does he use his reason in deliberation or bend his mind to it. Rather, like an animal he follows the inclination of his nature, without reason, without deliberation."<sup>21</sup>
- (d) John Bunyan, 1628-1688. Unregenerate man is not free to embrace the saving things of the kingdom of Christ. "It is no error to say, that a man *naturally* has Will, and a Power to pursue *his* will, and that as to *his* salvation. But it is a damnable error to say, that he hath will and power to pursue it, and that *in God's way* [emphasis added]."<sup>22</sup>
- (e) Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758. *Freedom of the Will* is perhaps his most acclaimed work. It declares that the direction of volition is established by the strongest motive or directive, which for unregenerate man is ever his sinful nature. "The subject [of the freedom of the will] is of such importance, as to *demand* attention, and the most thorough consideration. Of all kinds of knowledge that we can ever obtain, the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves, are the most important."<sup>23</sup>
- (f) John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882. In a "Letter on Free-Will," he declares that this popular notion only arises when sin is superficially perceived. "If Christ has come to save that which is lost, free-will has no longer any place."<sup>24</sup>
- (g) Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1834-1892. In his sermon entitled "Free-Will - A Slave," man is both legally and spiritually dead. Hence, his

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.p. 333.

<sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, II, 26.

<sup>22</sup> John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, II, p. 241, cf. p. 312.

<sup>23</sup> Edwards, *Works*, I, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> John Nelson Darby, *The Collected Works of John Nelson Darby*, X, pp. 185-7.

supposed “free-will” is the mythical liberty of a slave from which only Christ can emancipate.

Any one who believes that man’s will is entirely free, and that he can be saved by it, does not believe the fall. As I sometimes tell you, few preachers of religion do believe thoroughly the doctrine of the fall, or else they think that when Adam fell down he broke his little finger, and did not break his neck and ruin his race. Why, beloved, the fall broke man up entirely. It did not leave one power unimpaired; they were all shattered, and debased, and tarnished.<sup>25</sup>

- (2) What then is the point of this historic spectrum of doctrinal truth? It is for the purpose of reinforcing the fact that God’s sovereignty over the will of man inevitably means that God is sovereign over the redemption of man. Or as J. I. Packer writes:

There is really only *one* point to be made in the field of soteriology [salvation]: the point that *God saves sinners*. *God*—the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son and Spirit; three Persons working together in sovereign wisdom, power and love to achieve the salvation of a chosen people, the Father electing, the Son fulfilling the Father’s will by redeeming, the Spirit executing the purpose of Father and Son by renewing. *Saves*—does everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory: plans, achieves and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies. *Sinners*—men as God finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, blind, unable to lift a finger to do God’s will or better their spiritual lot. . . . Sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, . . . salvation, first and last, whole and entire, past, present and future, is of the Lord, to whom be glory for ever; amen!<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. The sovereignty of God over the *election* of sinful men.

- a. It is both biblically and logically conclusive that if God is sovereign over man’s thoroughly polluted condition, and his sinfully biased will in particular, then He must be sovereign in His gracious, particular election of sinners. At the heart of this choice is pure grace.
- (1) If man’s condition is one of spiritual deafness, blindness, deadness, and impotence, then salvation can in no sense originate within himself, not even true faith. Man is a spiritual Lazarus who needs Christ to give spiritual resurrection. Thus God “made us alive together with Christ (by race you have been saved” (Eph. 2:4-6).

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<sup>25</sup> Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, I, 52, pp. 705-706 (Ages Software).

<sup>26</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest For Godliness*, p. 130.

- (2) However, not only is God sovereign in giving life through Christ (Luke 11:22), but also He precedes that saving work by individually choosing individuals to whom He will give life. It is the sovereignty of this choice or election which is at the heart of salvation by grace. So concerning the salvation of Jews during Paul's ministry, and the principle applies to the Gentiles as well, "<sup>5</sup> in the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. <sup>6</sup> But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." (Rom. 11:5-6; cf. 9:10-13).
- b. God's election is, according to Berkhof, "that eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be the recipients of special grace and of eternal salvation."<sup>27</sup>
- (1) To use English words that are rooted in the basic New Testament meaning of "election," ἐκλεκτός, *eklektos*, God is "eclectic" or "selective." He chooses with discrimination "<sup>3</sup>Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies" (Rom. 8:33). "He chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him" (Eph. 1:4). "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3:12; cf. II Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1; I Pet. 1:1; 2:9).
- (a) Election in the realm of honor.
- 1) Jesus Christ. "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. (Isa. 42:1). "Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!'" (Luke 9:35; cf. Matt. 12:18; 23:35; I Pet. 2:4, 6).
  - 2) Angels. "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality." (I Tim. 5:21).
- (b) Election in the realm of grace.
- 1) National Israel. "<sup>6</sup> For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His

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<sup>27</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 114.

own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup> The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup> but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deut. 7:6-8; cf. Isa. 44:1-5; Acts 13:17).

- 2) The Church. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” (I Pet. 2:9).
  - 3) The Apostles. “<sup>16</sup> You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. . . . <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you” (John 15: 16, 19; cf. Luke 6:13; John 6:70; 13:18; Acts 1:2).
  - 4) Christians. “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies” (Rom. 8:33). “Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness” (Tit. 1:1; cf. Mark 13:20; I Cor. 1:26-29; Eph. 1:4; Col. 3:12; II Tim. 2:10; I Pet. 1:1-2; 2:9; Rev. 17:14).
- (2) John Bunyan in *A Confession Of My Faith* provides us with seven aspects of biblical election.<sup>28</sup>
- (a) Election is free and permanent, being founded in works-excluding grace and the unchangeable will of God. “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness’” (II Tim. 2:19; cf. Rom. 11:5-6; Eph. 1:11).
  - (b) Election was before the foundation of the world and thus before the elect had any being. “Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose

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<sup>28</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, II, pp. 598-9.

and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (II Tim. 1:9; cf. Rom. 4:17; Eph. 1:4).

- (c) Election excludes foreseen works, though it does result in holiness and the graces of the Spirit. "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him" (Eph. 1:4; cf. Rom. 8:29; Eph. 2:10; 3:8-11; II Tim. 1:9).
  - (d) Election is always considered in Jesus Christ, and without him there is neither election, grace, nor salvation. "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12; Eph. 1:5-7, 10).
  - (e) Election cannot be impeded or frustrated; nothing can negate or effectually oppose it. "For neither Israel nor Judah has been forsaken by his God, the LORD of hosts, although their land is full of guilt before the Holy One of Israel" (Jer. 51:5; cf. Acts 9:12-15; Rom. 8:30-35; 9:7).
  - (f) Election can only be known by an individual according to his particular calling. "I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, and I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, 'You are my God!'" (Hos. 2:23; Rom. 9:24-25).
  - (g) Election does not exclude means which God uses to bring us to Christ, grace, and glory. "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:12; II Pet. 1:10).
- (3) Perspectives of God's election in grace derived from the classic passage, Ephesians 1:3-14.
- (a) The *source* of God's election is His "purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, v. 11, cf. vs. 5, 9.
  - (b) The *motive* for God's election is His "love" and "the riches of His grace," vs. 4, 7, cf. Romans 9:15-16; I Thessalonians 1:4.
  - (c) The *ultimate purpose* of God's election is that the child of God should be "to the praise of His glory," vs. 12, 14.

- (d) The *complementary purpose* of God's election is that "we should be holy and blameless before Him," v. 4.
  - (e) The *time* of God's election is eternity past, that is "before the foundation of the world," and not when we first believed, v. 4.
  - (f) The *saving agent* of God's election is Jesus Christ and "redemption through His blood," vs. 4-5, 7, cf. John 6:37, 39-40; 17:2, 6.
  - (g) The *sealing agent* of God's election is "the Holy Spirit of promise" as "a pledge," vs. 13-14, cf. Ephesians 4:30; II Corinthians 1:21-22.
  - (h) The *objects* of God's election are "us" and "we" and "you," vs. 3-9, 11-13, who are later defined as soul-dead, worldly sinners, 2:1-3.
- (4) Clarification of God's election in grace.
- (a) The election of some men through grace presupposes the guilt of all men. <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:18-20; cf. 2:12-15). God does not owe the gospel to any man, as if he were an innocent heathen. After all, why would the innocent need the gospel?
  - (b) The objects of God's particular election are individuals, not a mere corporate identity. "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3). "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). The church is an elect body because it is comprised of elect individuals (I Pet. 2:9-10).
  - (c) The antithesis of particular election is not particular reprobation (damnation), but particular preterition (abandonment). God passes by those He does not choose to salvation, and so leaves them to their just deserts. <sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over [abandoned them] in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. . . . <sup>26</sup> For this reason God gave them over [abandoned them] to degrading passions; for their women exchanged



the natural function for that which is unnatural. . . .<sup>28</sup> And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over [abandoned them] to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper" (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). Those in hell will only have themselves to blame, not God.

- c. God's election in grace in relation to His foreknowledge. It is common for Christians to suggest, and without a great deal of thought, that God's particular election of sinners to salvation is based upon His omniscience, His knowledge in advance, as to who will or will not believe. So such knowledge, of course in no way being causative, yet advises Him as to who will be elect according the individual's autonomous faith.
  - (1) Does God elect simply because He knows in advance who will believe (Rom. 8:29-30)? In other words, is God merely a good predictor (I Pet. 1:1-2)? On the contrary, and logically rather than chronologically speaking, God knows in advance *because* He foreordains and elects individuals to salvation.
    - (a) Sometimes in Scripture "foreknowledge" means knowing in advance as with simple prescience. "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men" (II Pet. 3:17). Of course this is with regard to simple human foreknowledge. However, often the context indicates a different and much more profound meaning.
    - (b) In Scripture, "to know" often means more than bare, factual cognition. Rather it can speak of intimacy of relationship (Gen. 4:1; Amos 3:2 NKJV; Matt. 7:23; John 10:14-15, 27; I Cor. 8:3; II Tim. 2:19). So in Romans 11:2, "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." Here "foreknowledge" means "intimate knowledge before," or "love before time," or "forelove," and not mere awareness in the past.
    - (c) Hence we read in Romans 8:29, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." Here "foreknowledge" is best understood as "prior distinguishing, determining love," since Paul writes, "For those *whom* [emphasis added] He foreknew," without any suggestion of foreseen faith. So Murray translates, "[for] whom he knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight."<sup>29</sup> Jeremiah 1:5 expresses the same divine thought concerning the prophet: "Before I formed you in

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<sup>29</sup> Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, I, pp. 315-318.

the womb I knew you.” Similarly James Small has written in his well known hymn:

I’ve found a Friend; O such a Friend!  
 He loved me ere [before] I knew Him;  
 He drew me with the cords of love,  
 And thus He bound me to Him.  
 And round my heart still closely twine  
 Those ties which naught can sever,  
 For I am His and He is mine,  
 For ever and for ever.

- (d) There is similar thought in I Peter 1:1-2. “<sup>1</sup> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen <sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge/prior love/intimate knowledge before [πρόγνωσις, prognōsis] of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.” Here “foreknowledge” precedes God’s election since it is that preceding love which moves Him to choose sinners, so that they might be “sprinkled with His [Christ’s] blood.” It is significant that while the NASB accurately translates προγινώσκω, proginōskōō, in I Peter 1:20 as “[Christ] *foreknown* [emphasis added] before the foundation of the world,” yet the KJV translates “[Christ] *foreordained* [emphasis added] before the foundation of the world.”
- (2) Reason also indicates that foreknowledge understood as foreseen faith is an unreasonable explanation of biblical election.
- (a) By way of illustration, imagine arriving at a birthday party uninvited declaring that because you are there you are invited! However, a legitimate guest only arrives having been previously invited. So God elects, then grants faith, and as a consequence has foreknowledge of what is predestined to occur.
- (b) Election based upon foreseen faith establishes man as the arbiter concerning the determination of God’s elect. It is in reality election after the fact or postordination! Strong comments:

Foreknowledge implies fixity, and fixity implies decree. . . . No undecreed event can be foreseen. . . . Only knowledge of that which is decreed is foreknowledge. . . . God therefore foresees creation, causes,

laws, events, consequences; that is, because he has embraced these in his plan.<sup>30</sup>

5. In conclusion, let C. H. Spurgeon sum up the supreme importance of this vital matter.

There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation - the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands - the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne. On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth. And we proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon His throne whom we trust.<sup>31</sup>

## F. GOD COMMUNICATES HIS SOVEREIGNTY (DOMINION)

1. Man has lesser sovereignty than God.
  - a. Again, we distinguish between omnipotence and sovereignty. Man is not "all-powerful" in any sense. But he does have a degree of delegated dominion or sovereignty that he administers, over part of God's universe, employing a degree of potency and wisdom.
  - b. Charnock comments: "[God] rules in the heavens alone; there is some shadow of empire in the world; royalty is communicated to men as his substitutes. He hath disposed a vicarious dominion to men in his footstool on earth, he gives them some share of his authority, and therefore the title of his name (Ps. 82:6). . . . He rules men that are on his footstool by others of the same kind, men of their own nature."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 356-8

<sup>31</sup> Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, II, p. 185.

<sup>32</sup> Charnock, *Works*, II, pp. 404-5.

2. Man has sovereignty over his earthly habitat.

- a. He reigns over the animal world. By this very appointment man is shown to have a nobility, a personal superiority, a governing ability, a spiritual capacity, that far exceeds the matrix of animals.

(1) It is a responsibility that attends those who are created in the image of God. <sup>26</sup> Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' <sup>27</sup> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. <sup>28</sup> God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Gen. 1:26-28). This responsibility, that abhors animal abuse, is surely directed by God's great love for the work of His hands (Job 39:1-30).

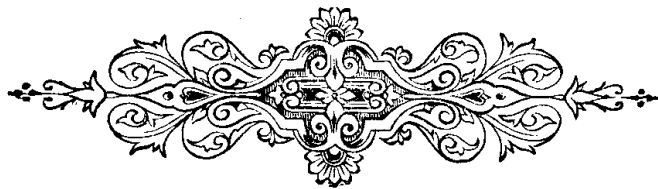
(2) It is a glorious privilege that gives rulership over the work of God's hands. <sup>3</sup> When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; <sup>4</sup> what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? <sup>5</sup> Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty! <sup>6</sup> You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, <sup>7</sup> all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, <sup>8</sup> the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas" (Ps. 8:3-8).

- b. He reigns over mankind. This is the dominion of man over man that establishes order and government, as determined by God. "The Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes" (Dan. 4:25).

(1) It is God's to bestow, withdraw, and reappoint. "A voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, and you will be driven away from mankind. . . . So I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me'" (Dan, 4:31-32, 36).

(2) It is misunderstood by an unbelieving world. <sup>10</sup> So Pilate said to Him, 'You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?' <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered, 'You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.'" (John 19:10-11).

- (3) It calls for subjection by man to man. “<sup>1</sup> Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.” (Rom. 13:1-2).
3. By way of application, those who ardently uphold God’s sovereignty in the realms of creation, providence, and redemption, ought to be most sensitive concerning their exercise of human sovereignty.
- a. As they appreciate the goodness of God’s creation, so they will maintain that goodness in their own exercise of sovereignty.
  - b. As they appreciate God’s providence, so they will reflect providence in their own exercise of sovereignty.
  - c. As they appreciate God’s sovereign grace, so there will be grace in their own exercise of sovereignty.



GOD'S infinitude belongs to us [as children of God] and is made known to us for our everlasting profit. Yet, just what does it mean to us beyond the wonder of thinking about it? Much every way, and more as we come to know ourselves and God better.

Because God's nature is infinite, everything that flows out of it is infinite also. We poor human creatures are constantly being frustrated by limitations imposed upon us from without and within. The days of the years of our lives are few, and swifter than a weaver's shuttle. Life is a short and fevered rehearsal for a concert we cannot stay to give. Just when we appear to have attained some proficiency we are forced to lay our instruments down. There is simply not time enough to think, to become, to perform what the constitution of our natures indicates we are capable of.

How completely satisfying it is to turn from our limitations to a God who has none. Eternal years lie in His heart. For Him time does not pass, it remains; and those who are in Christ share with Him all the riches of limitless time and endless years. God never hurries. There are no deadlines against which He must work. Only to know this is to quiet our spirits and relax our nerves. For those out of Christ, time is a devouring beast; before the sons of the new creation time crouches and purrs and licks their hands. The foe of the old human race becomes the friend of the new. And the stars in their courses fight for the man God delights to honor. This we may learn from the divine infinitude.

*A. W. Tozer*