

Fully Accepting God's Sovereignty (Part Four)

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We are going to begin this sermon with a passage that I believe is a good foundation for a sermon on God's sovereignty because it broadly states His loving greatness toward us.

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

This will be the fourth and possibly the final sermon in this series but I want us to understand the strength of the term *sovereignty* since that is what we are accepting. This word is formed from three different roots, and all three roots indicate leadership of great height. The original root indicates "to move in a straight line," like a drum-major leader in a band; thus a sovereign is one who is out in front. He is a leader—one who reigns—and thus a ruler.

I am not going to go into the second and third roots in any detail, but both of those roots indicate "high" or "great," and it is through these two roots that sovereign is distantly related to both "super" and "hyper," and I think you are familiar with both those terms.

A sovereign is not an underling. He leads; others follow. Sovereign indicates someone supreme, the ultimate, and that is why I read those scriptures, because that is what Paul is saying. There is nobody higher than our Great God. Now "sovereign *ty*" is the state or the circumstance, the area of *being* the supreme authority, and this term indicates *complete independence and self-government*. He answers to nobody, if you understand the drift.

As concerns God, though, He stands above all others who are or would be leaders. He is not only supreme in authority, He is supreme in every circumstance, every attribute, and every quality, such as knowledge, understanding, wisdom, judgment, mercy, and love, and He truly is "all in all."

Sovereignty is a subject that we of the Western world do not tend to spend a great deal of time considering. Partly this is because we do not have the form of government that forces us to think much about jurisdiction in regard to a one-person government. Yes, we have rulers, but we also have a republic form of government which tends to strongly influence us to think about ourselves and our *personal* jurisdiction.

In the church most of our sermons focus on naming our responsibilities and how we should fulfill them in relation to God, because that is what our jurisdiction is limited to, and as we begin to examine this, we, as individuals, are not sovereign over very much at all. This is not wrong, but what about God's place in this picture, how and why we must fulfill our responsibility directly to Him? Does not God have sovereign rights that we must not only merely obey and respect, but also honor and glorify Him with our response?

Our foundational responsibility is clearly stated by Jesus, and almost every time that we counsel somebody for baptism we go over these scriptures quite thoroughly in Luke 14. We are not going to go through them real thoroughly; I am just going to read them to remind you of them so that you understand.

Luke 14:25-27 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [love less by comparison] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

Luke 14:33 "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

That makes it pretty clear. Jesus is saying to every one of us, “I must come first. Nobody is to come before Me.” We are to give of ourselves completely to His leadership as living sacrifices, as Paul terms it there in Romans 12:1. This circumstance is not completely one-sided though, because, as I was showing you in the previous sermon, there is a basket of very good fruit produced by this arrangement. If we will adhere to what He says, we are going to be very greatly blessed by Him. So it is not all one-sided. We give something, and in a way He gives a great deal more that is going to insure that we are going to be in His Kingdom.

Each quality in this basket of fruit (which is what I called it in that previous sermon), is linked to a complete package. I am not saying that these fruits are produced in neat one, two, three order, but they are nonetheless linked, and the reason they are not linked in that kind of order is everybody does not learn or grow at the same rate and does not have the same need, and so we will be given or produce a fruit faster in one area than we might in the other. But most of the time the fruit that begins to appear first is the fear of God.

This fear has some measure of concern, fright, within it, but the fear of God is based in deep reverence and appreciation for His magnificent qualities which we will never grasp unless the relationship is close, and the relationship is continued. This is why He said there in John 8 that we will know the truth if we continue, if we abide in His truth. But the fear of God does not repel. It is actually like a magnet that draws us to Him, not flee from Him in terror.

A second fruit is that our pride, which motivated us all our life to resist God until God began revealing Himself, gradually begins diminishing and is supplanted by humility as our recognition of and appreciation for His qualities grows within us.

We are going to continue on this fruit for awhile as I lay groundwork for the bulk of this sermon. I want you to turn with me to the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

This is where we left off when time expired on me as I was giving the previous sermon on this. I want you to understand that the knowledge that is spoken of here is not the kind of knowledge that man can normally produce with his own mind apart from God, but rather specifically is referring to godly knowledge, and that this knowledge is produced within the relationship. Now understanding what is being spoken here helps one understand why a close intimate relationship is necessary. It cannot be a part-time thing. It cannot be something that we flippantly fail to observe. God demands that we put Him first in our life, and so it means that we have to work at keeping our mind in check so that it is focused on Him.

To add to verse 7 we will go to chapter 2, verses 1 through 7.

Proverbs 2:1-7 My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly.

This is not something we can be passive about. I want you to get the feeling that is here that is required in our responsibility to Him that we make efforts to achieve what it is that He is talking about here.

Proverbs 2:10-12 When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things.

I am just giving an overview of what this relationship will produce.

Proverbs 4:5-7 Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is

the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.

In terms of this sermon, the key to understanding at this point is that obtaining the knowledge of God is progressive in nature. It is not produced all at once, and what we see established by the relationship is a path toward producing ever more valuable fruit, and glorifying God while we are doing that. These valuable fruits will never be produced unless the relationship exists and is promoted because we give ourselves to working on it.

I frequently ask the question, “Do you see God?” Do you see Him evermore clearly in your mind’s eye, and do you also see why we must seek *Him*? God is the One who initiates the relationship. He seeks us out first, or there never would be a relationship. We do not really, as unconverted people, know what to look for. Almost every one of us would look for a god who demands that we keep Sunday. Just one little clue. How many more things are there about the *real* God, the true God, that we do not know, do not understand even though we might have gone to church all our life?

God must initiate the relationship, but after that initiation is finished, then responsibility begins to fall upon us that we seek Him. We do not do it to find Him, because that has already been taken care of, but more importantly at this point in the relationship, it is to be like Him. We seek Him for a different reason. We want to imitate Him. We want to be in His image. We want to see as many and as much as we possibly can about His characteristics, and so this responsibility falls on us, and that is why I went through Isaiah 55—because it broaches that subject.

Now to illustrate what I meant when I said that we have to come to *see* God, I used the illustration drawn from the example of Job, Isaiah, and Daniel, and what they experienced after they *literally* saw God. When we come to *see* God in our mind’s eye, and what He is in all His attributes, the same result occurs to us in regard to our understanding of Him as Job, Isaiah, and Daniel accumulated, except that it comes a great deal slower. When they literally saw Him, they were awed into unconsciousness. Now it comes to us much more slowly. Regardless of coming much more slowly, it is of very great value.

Go with me now to Romans. Chapter 3 begins a vivid description of the conduct that the evil heart of mankind produces.

Romans 3:10-11 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.”

This is what we came out of. Can you imagine that? All those religious people out there and God says they are not seeking after Him, and I gave you a simple reason why. They do not know what to look for.

Romans 3:12-18 “They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Verse 18 tells why this all occurs: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” The fear of God is not a servile, cringing, and enslaving terror, but a mixture of love, admiration, and respect for what He is. What we see in Romans 3 is a clear description of the way the world perceives God, and thus why it acts toward Him and each other as they do. We will never learn what He is truly like unless the relationship continues.

We know the truth, and our God is a Father who pities His children. He is a ruler who looks upon him who is poor and of a contrite heart in order to help those who trust Him. He is a physician who heals the body, cleanses the spirit, mercifully forgives, and gives sound counsel so His children can work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Thus when the fear of God begins to enter a person’s life, it sets the stage for the second benefit to those coming to know God.

When the fear of God enters a man’s evil heart, godly knowledge, godly understanding, and godly wisdom begin to grow. Now why? It is because of being given the Spirit of God, and partly because we begin making better choices, and because of making better choices, the person’s enslavement to

his own evil heart begins to be broken from which come all the defiling corruptions that leads to death, as Jesus shows in Matthew 15.

By nature man is focused on his self-importance and its companion of self-concern. This pride dominates the unconverted person's attitude and choices. Now to correct it is something that will take the wind out of his sails and thoroughly humble him. That correction truly, rightly, and honestly begins when a man is truly beginning to be able to compare himself to the greatness of God, and he turns into nothing. Zilch! Nada! Jesus approached this very early in His ministry. Man will live either to serve himself, or seek to serve and please God. It will be one or the other, because, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "No man can serve two masters."

I want you to notice something that appears in Exodus 5. A wonderful bit of wisdom came from an unlikely source, and we will learn from it.

Exodus 5:1-2 Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" "And Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, . . ."

This is a very interesting admission when this term "to know God" comes into *our* life. Why is this relationship just given to us? It is so we will not answer like Pharaoh did. We will instead respond, "I know the Lord." In verse 2 Pharaoh said, "I do not know the LORD," . . .

Exodus 5:2 . . . "nor will I let Israel go."

That was his problem. That is the problem of the unconverted. They do not know God, and brethren, coming to know Him remains a major hurdle for us as well. So many things intervene in our lives to try to keep us away from doing diligence to really seek Him out, and so we can keep busy with entertainments. We can keep busy with school, with our employment, or whatever, and lose ourselves in those things and kind of forget about God except for the Sabbath or whatever, and we do not really grow in knowing the Lord.

This little episode here with Pharaoh gives us a simple truth—irreverence of God, as Pharaoh clearly showed, promotes prideful disobedience. Its opposite—the fear of God as Moses and Aaron had— promotes humility and submission. They *knew* God, and they knew they had to submit to Him regardless of how scary the detail was that God gave them to carry out. I do not think it was easy for them to go before the Pharaoh, who, as far as we know, was the greatest ruler in that part of the world at that time, but they had to do it.

Later on the Two Witnesses are going to have to do that right in Jerusalem, and who knows where else they will travel in the world. It is going to be scary, but because they know God, they know God is with them, and they are going to have faith that they are going to be taken care of just like Moses and Aaron were.

So knowing God in His sovereignty removes every ground for man to rely on himself and boast. Doing that feeds the pride. But the difference between God and us is so great it is easily seen, and salvation, brethren, is of the Lord. It is by grace through faith. It puffs up a man to think that he is contributing greatly to his redemption and salvation, but John tells us in John 1:13 that we are born (I should say born again. I will fill that in for you of what he understands what he is talking about here), not of the will of the flesh. We did not will it, but God did, and we are still flesh. Humility, thus, is a product of the right kind of self-evaluation that a man must make against God, and nobody else.

If we are grasping the sovereignty of God, it leads us to praise Him for what He is, and that He is our salvation, and so with this desire for salvation we allow our knowledge of God to humble ourselves before Him. This means that we have only one way we can turn when it comes to making the right choices. We must choose to submit to His will in obedience.

We are going to go to I Peter 5.

I Peter 5:5-8 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand

of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

This is an interesting metaphor—“be clothed with humility.” Clothing is something we put on. We do it consciously. We make choices about the clothing we are going to wear depending upon what we are going to do, but in spiritual terms we are *always* to be clothed with humility, and the metaphor is apt, it is right, it is good.

Peter gives quite a number of assertive commands, each one of which forces us to make a choice. “Be sober.” We can be sober. “Be vigilant.” We can really be on guard. He also says, “Humble yourself.” Do you see what I am driving at? Being humble is a choice we make. It is not something God just heaps on us. We have to *choose* to be humble, but it is preceded by self-evaluation that begins to arise because we are beginning to see God after He calls us and gives us His Spirit. He begins to educate us, and the right knowledge begins to come into our mind.

We can then understand that we have been gifted to be able to make the choice to humble ourselves in obedience to Him. It is not something left to chance. We have to be thinking, and so each time that we submit to God’s instruction, it is a humbling of ourselves before Him.

Is that not what God says in Deuteronomy 30:19? I know that we turn to this scripture so often, but I want to turn to it again because it is something that really has to be drilled into our mind. We will just read it without going into all the background.

Deuteronomy 30:19 I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.

The long and short of this is, those who are humble in a godly way choose life; and thus we are given a right principle. Yielding to God’s sovereignty provides the proper comparisons for us so we can wisely make even *more*

right choices. Human nature's pride is going to be fighting tooth and toenail to hang on to its enslavement of us, and so it has to be overcome.

Hopefully, as we continue along the way, we begin to develop those characteristics and we will respond to God regardless of what the cost might be to the self. And I am not kidding you, that is not always easy, and sometimes it is embarrassing. Sometimes it is physically painful, like somebody getting ready to chop off your head. I hope that does not happen to any of us, but almost every one of us at sometime in our conversion was psychologically embarrassed before friends, before relatives as we were exposed for what we are—a follower of God, and that we believe things other people consider as unimportant; but to us they are important.

What is it then that hinders us from submitting to God in obedience? We might frequently answer that question by saying “human nature.” That is correct, and it is also very general. Often it is sheer ignorance. We simply do not know any better because we do not know what God requires, or we do not know specifically what He might require in a given situation. At other times, perhaps more often, we do know some measure of God's will, and it is sheer stubbornness, pride, or weakness of the flesh, or a strong desire at the moment that drives us to not care sufficiently to humbly submit.

Now once the sovereignty of the Author of the Word is truly understood, it will no longer be a matter of picking and choosing. God's Word will be seen as the *only* standard that truly meets our approval, and that, brethren, will be wonderful. When we reach that point we will give Him our whole-hearted submission. I am not going to say every time. There will be times like Jesus Christ faced. When He was crucified, He said, “Father, I would like You to take this away from Me, but nevertheless, Your will be done.”

You know that He was facing difficulty, and He was not looking toward obeying God at that time with the greatest of enthusiasm. So we have that example, that even Jesus Christ had those thoughts go through His mind. We have to understand that this is not something that happens immediately and without resistance from our deeply entrenched carnal nature; however, with the addition of humility to the fear of God, as that humility gradually is supplanting our prideful resistance derived from Satan, we have more than a fighting chance to make the right choice.

Now being able to see God brings an awareness of our weaknesses and our smallness as it did to those three men, and gradually creates a childlike dependence that opens the eyes of our mind as to how much we need contact with Him, because without contact with Him, and without submission, there will be no salvation.

Suppose you were asked, “Who are the greatest people in your community, in your town?” What kind of qualities would you search through your mind to name somebody to that position? Would you be looking for money, power, authority, prestige, technical learning, or maybe somebody of military conquest? It is very interesting because the disciples were arguing about some of these things before Jesus straightened them out as to greatness.

Matthew 18:1-5 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.”

Jesus is not saying here that every child possesses these qualities. Those qualities a child generally seems to have by nature do beget an obedient walk though in our pilgrimage with Christ.

What He is doing here is using the ideal to illustrate what we need as a goal, an ideal to compare ourselves against and to work toward. He would not have given this instruction if being childlike was not a choice that we can make. Like humbling ourselves, we can become childlike by making the choices to *be* like a child. That too comes with the relationship with God if we are growing, and therefore knowing God and its combination of the fruits of the fear and humility opens the door to implicit obedience, and this is the third fruit in my little collection here: implicit obedience.

I am not sure who the author of Psalm 119 was, but I want you to turn there. We are just going to look at two verses. I chose these verses because there is

no doubt that the person who composed this psalm was a thinking individual who had a wonderful relationship with God, and so he left this to us to learn from. God put it in His Word. Listen to the advice in verses 35 through 38. Notice he is asking this in prayer.

Psalm 119:35-38 Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way. Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You.

This person had somewhat to say about things that are important that will lead to humility, that will lead to a childlike attitude. Here was a grown man coming to God and asking for God to implant these things in his mind.

Psalm 119:132-133 Look upon me and be merciful to me, as Your custom is toward those who love Your name. Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.

These are examples we must cry out to God for if we are going to develop the quality that will encourage Him to give us more and more. Understanding and making use of God's sovereignty produces a third benefit added to the fear of God and humility. As I mentioned before, it is implicit obedience.

We are going to go back to the New Testament. The apostle Paul touched on this. I am not going to spend a great deal of time on it. In II Timothy 2 Paul is giving a formula for growth to the young minister Timothy.

II Timothy 2:2-5 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

Verse 5 is the one that I want for this particular sermon—“And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.”

We all know what obedience is. It is compliance with rules, with authority, and we are familiar with it because from our earliest days in life we have been faced with submitting to rules and authority beginning in the home to our parents. That compliance gradually expands to rules and principles regarding our personal safety so that we do not get hurt through injury, or possibly even bring death upon ourselves. We face making these choices before public figures like teachers and policemen, and in athletic contests.

We gradually learn that if we do not follow the rules, we are disqualified and suffer loss in some way, and we soon come to the conclusion that those who play the game the best, according to the rules, win the game. This is why Paul gave this particular bit of encouragement. You play the game (We are calling it a game.), by the rules.

What we are involved in though is not a table game or a mere athletic contest. It is obedience in our relation to God for being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ for glorifying God and for salvation.

One of the major keys in what I said regarding the fruit is the word “implicit”—implicit obedience. Our most common use of this word is in the sense of something that is hinted at, not directly stated; however, it also indicates unreserved, unquestioning, and absolute compliance even though something (a rule) is not directly stated. My dictionary used the example *implied obedience*, meaning obedience is expected even though it is not directly stated.

We come to learn this in regard to the spirit of God’s law. Not everything that we *should* do, or should *not* do is directly stated in the Word of God, but if it fits within the context of the spirit of the law, then obedience is being implied even though it is not directly stated. That is what we are aiming for in these fruits that come forth out of a relationship with God.

It is easy to look at a direct commandment of God in His Word. It was so easy except it is easier to those who are growing in the grace and knowledge

of Jesus Christ because of the relationship with God that they can see more in what is going on than is actually stated, and they know which way to turn. They look beyond the mere words, if I can go that way.

We can make a lot of mistakes in this area, but God expects us to grow. It is not the individual mistakes that concern God, it is the path that the person is on—are they growing and overcoming? And so what I put in here is that this relationship with God works within us so that we are anticipating the direction something is going in, and we are prepared even before we actually go into it. That is what God is leading us toward, and so the obedience then comes because we anticipated it beforehand, or the rejection comes because we anticipated it before. That is implied as we go along. That is taking obedience to another level than just the Word of God.

So this is the fruit of fully accepting what sovereignty produces, and it is the fruit of being consistently trustworthy in obedience even though it might be a new situation to you.

We are not going to spend anymore time on that one, and the remaining time is going to be spent on the fourth fruit because it is one that concerns us all. It is another benefit, another fruit, and it is one that is not always appreciated because it is not always understood as to what is the cause and the solution to a situation, a circumstance that we find ourselves in.

One of the truly distinctive terms the Bible uses to describe the Israelites' attitude as they journeyed through the wilderness is formed of the term "murmuring." This is a term we do not use much today. We would most likely use a form of complain, gripe, grumble, protest, criticize, or whine. We are good at that!

I am going to give you an example that almost seems to be in the genes of the Israelitish people. Probably all people are like this, but God used the Israelites as an example. I want you to go to Exodus 15. The best way to look at what I am going to read here is to understand (and I know you do) the circumstance in which this occurred. It occurred immediately following one of the most stupendous miracles that have ever happened on the face of the earth: God divided the sea. We find that they are singing this great hymn.

Exodus 15:21-24 And Miriam answered them: “Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!” [Yeah God!] So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people complained against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?”

Well, God solved that problem. We go on now to chapter 16.

Exodus 16:1-3 And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Brethren, we should be able to see what this kind of attitude does to a person. What they witnessed in that stupendous miracle was erased from their minds, and all they could think of was their immediate need. It apparently never entered their minds that the God who split the Red Sea could provide food—something really simple by comparison—something that really did not require all that much power.

Do you know that the KJV uses a form of “murmur” 24 times in reference to the children of Israel just in the wilderness?

It is natural to complain against affliction, against losses when hopeful expectations are dashed, or maybe they never seem to arrive, and it seems to be built right into us to think that our possessions are ours unconditionally.

A word that we heard frequently through the presidential election thing was “entitlement”—to think that when something is given to us once we have a right to it again, and maybe again. It seems to especially occur when we are deprived of those things on which we have really set our heart. We feel that when we have planned and we worked diligently that we are entitled to success, and we deserve to keep and enjoy what we have accumulated. We believe that when we are surrounded by a loving family that no one has the right to break into that circle and strike down a loved one, even if it might have been God. We must constantly remember, though our lives are being lived under the sovereignty of God, His watchful oversight is on us constantly and always for our good.

Now what is our reaction to Him when everything is not going well? It is very easy to gripe without even thinking of the God who is ever-watchful, and who promises to supply our every need, and we may find ourselves complaining to Him about our state of affairs like He is totally unaware. Is it possible that we have forgotten that this One who, by His grace, has called us into a relationship with Him, and has neither afflicted us nor allowed us to be afflicted anywhere near to what we truly deserve as the wage of our sinful life? Thus there is a fourth fruit to fully accepting the sovereignty of God. If we stick to it, it will bring resignation into our life.

Being resigned to something almost seems as though it is a position of defeat, as though we at best have to choose the lesser of two evils rather than being able to forge ahead in confidence because God lives, and He is still on His throne.

The *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines “resignation” as “the quality of being submissive; unresisting acquiescence.” *The Reader's Digest Complete Oxford Word Finder* defines it as “uncomplaining endurance of a sorrow or difficulty.”

But though having a right and true recognition of God's sovereignty, the griping that we are so prone to, is because human nature is so very easily offended, feel insulted, or feel being taken advantage of, and it loses its grip.

Much of this changes because of the fruit of humility that precedes it. One of the major benefits of intelligently living by faith while seeking God through His Word is the gradually growing awareness of God and His loving nearness and oversight of our life. A better understanding of God's sovereignty teaches us that there must be in us knowledge that our lives truly are in His hands. This is not always easy. He owns us body and soul, and besides that, we are in His view at all times, and it is our responsibility to bow to His will, and therefore, regardless of our circumstances, He, because of what He is, is more than able to take care of us.

Let us go to a very familiar set of scriptures in I Corinthians 10. We were talking about the Israelites and their going through the wilderness. Paul says there in verse 5:

I Corinthians 10:5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

I Corinthians 10:10 Nor complain [This is one of the things God judged them for. He judged them for their murmuring.], as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

God set Satan on them. Satan is the destroyer. They were put to death. He executed them because they complained. They should have known better. That was God's judgment. "Look at all I did for you. Do you think that I don't have the power to feed you? Do you think that I don't have the power to find water for you?" That is what they were saying in their complaint, in their griping. You see, they were not resigned to the way God was teaching them.

I Corinthians 10:11-13 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not

allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

In God's wisdom sometimes He delays for a goodly period of time, and that is for our good, but it is hard for us to accept. But He never afflicts us with more than what we deserve, nor more than we can bear, so He chooses poverty for us, or poor health, or family problems. We must always remember that He never piles more on us than we deserve, because after all, we killed His Son. Besides that, He has great plans for us in His Kingdom.

I once read of a very upset woman who complained to her minister that people—church members—she said scorned her family by saying derogatory things of them, and she asked the minister, “Had anybody else ever gone through those things and had to endure them?” He said, “Yes. Jesus Christ never did a thing wrong in His life, and yet people attempted to stone Him. All His disciples abandoned Him, and the government put Him to death—an innocent man. And He not only did not complain, He accepted God's will, and before He died, He forgave them all.” Even Job said, “The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away.”

There are places in the Bible that people had to do some difficult things. Samuel was only a very young boy, but God gave this boy the message to deliver to Eli—“Your sons are going to be put to death.” Do you know what Eli said? It is a good example. “Let the Lord do what seems good to Him.” He was resigned to it. He knew what his sons were like. He fully accepted.

How about Aaron? He lost two sons in the blink of an eye. They did something they should not have done. They disrespected God. That is what they did, and He sent a lightning bolt, and they were dead in a moment. And Moses said to Aaron, “Don't you dare give any indication at all that you are sorry, that you disagreed.” Pretty high standard. But Moses knew that God was justified in what He did.

Turn to James 4. It is because of this quality of resignation that these verses are in the Bible.

James 4:13-15 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.”

Brethren, we never can let get out of our mind that God is the Potter, and we are the clay. He is the One doing the creating, and if He has determined that He needs to put us through something in order that qualities that are going to be good in His Kingdom and bring glory to Him will be built in us, He is going to do it because He loves us, and that pain and suffering is actually a positive creative force if we accept it in an attitude of resignation. He is the Creator, and we are being created.

One of the most difficult things we have to face in this kind of a situation is that we are looking through a glass darkly. That is the way Paul put it, and we do not know for sure all that is going on. We only know that we are going through something that is very uncomfortable, and we would like to get rid of it. But there are good reasons why we are going through that, and this is a reality we must learn to live with and deal with it by accepting it fully, or we will always be on the edge of murmuring about being taken advantage of.

I am going to conclude with this example. It is kind of interesting. It is not directly out of the Bible at all, but I think it is a good example. This is about a common citizen just like you and me. As far as I know this man was not even converted, but he saw this as important.

I was beginning to prepare this sermon as a possible conclusion to the “God’s Sovereignty” series when I heard Charles Whitaker’s sermon in which he mentioned Mr. Armstrong’s encounter with the man who claimed it was just as much of a sin to sing a lie as it was to actually say it. For some reason, even while we were listening to that tape, it came to mind, and within a moment I was thinking of a song that was in the old gray hymnal we had in Worldwide Church of God. One of the songs in there was, “It Is Well With

My Soul.” We sang that often, and it did not make the cut whenever we went to the other hymnal. I did a Google search on the song and I found the background about what motivated the lyrics of that song, and I am going to give them to you.

The lyrics were written by a man named Horatio Spafford. He was a very well-to-do lawyer in Chicago, Illinois in the 1870s. He was successful financially. He was also an elder in the Presbyterian Church. And then a string of devastating losses hit Mr. and Mrs. Spafford. Now compare your troubles with this man.

In 1869 or 1870 their first child, a 4 year old son, died of a fever. About a year later, in 1871, the famous Chicago fire occurred and they lost their entire fortune because most of his money was tied up in assets that burned down. He began rebuilding his finances, and within a few years they were back on their feet. They were doing pretty well once again and they decided they were going to take an extended vacation to France. At the last moment he could not accompany the family because some business transaction came up, so he and his wife planned that she would go on ahead and he would stay there and take care of things, and then a week or so later he would get on another ship and go there and meet them in France.

Well, she and the children were on their way to France. The steamship was chugging along, and of all things a sailing boat ran into the side of that steamboat, and the steamboat sank, according to the report, in twelve minutes. Mrs. Spafford lived. Four daughters drowned in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Mr. and Mrs. Stafford finally did get together. They had another son. At the same age of 4 he got a fever, and he died. He had the same name as the first boy.

Mr. Spafford wrote this poem as he was sailing to meet his wife after they lost the four daughters. It does not give everything in terms of faith and so forth, but I think his acceptance shows up in these words, and I think they are rather admirable. He wrote:

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

It is interesting that Mr. Spafford did not write the music. He wrote the lyrics. Some man that he probably knew did. His name was Philip Bliss. Philip Bliss was another man who was well known in the Chicago area, and he first sang the song at a religious meeting on November 24, 1876. One month later Mr. and Mrs. Bliss died in a train wreck. The song seemed plagued, does it not?

The series of tragedies ruined Mr. Spafford's reputation in the Chicago area because of the prevailing thought at that time that there was such a string of tragedies he was surely a great sinner, and it drove him from the city. So Mr. Spafford and his wife emigrated all the way to Israel, and they devoted their life over there to people who did not know, to charity. Mr. Spafford died in 1888 of malaria. His wife lived on till 1923, and she too died in Israel.

I hope that you will understand that this relationship with God has opened up to us a requirement for us that God intends that we now seek Him. He sought us out and made it possible for us to seek Him, and He expects us to devote

our lives to doing that. Do not forget that this is not a one-sided equation at all, because, as we are going through that relationship, He is producing fruit in us that is going to be good for His Kingdom. It is not time wasted at all.