

## The Sovereignty Of God (Part 11)

Values of the Sovereignty Doctrine

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 22-Jun-96; Sermon #244

I am going to begin the sermon in II Chronicles the 7th chapter. The circumstance here is after the dedication of the temple, and God appeared to Solomon after that occasion was over.

**II Chronicles 7:12** The LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for a house of sacrifice.

I think that it is especially good to apply this to the church. That is really why I am using this, and I am not all that concerned about the temple—the ancient temple as a physical building where God was dwelling. I am thinking about this more in terms of the church being the temple in which God is dwelling.

**II Chronicles 7:13** If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people;

That ought to give you an indication already that He is saying, if His people are sinning and things are beginning to go wrong, God is working to get their attention and turn them around.

**II Chronicles 7:14** If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

I chose to begin here because two weeks ago the focus of my sermon was on the attitudes that should be developed as a result of recognition of God's sovereignty. The five things that I gave you during the course of that sermon were:

- 1) The fear of God
- 2) Implicit obedience

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

- 3) Entire resignation
- 4) Thankfulness and praise
- 5) An adoring worship of God

Every single one of these is an element of humility, or they have a strong tendency to intensify its existence. This is very important because as these verses imply (especially verse 14), humility is a very important player in the process leading to growth and becoming in the image of God, and in salvation itself. Notice how humility is at the head of the list. Notice also that His people are to seek His face. Remember the two sermons about prayer. God knows already, before we ever come to Him, what it is that we need.

We are not introducing anything new to Him, yet He requires that we come to Him anyway, that we **seek His face** for the things that we need. So humility heads the list. We are to seek His face, even though He knows already. He requires that we become aware of our need, and seek that need from Him. Notice also how this verse brings obedience into focus as part of that process. I am saying this because during the course of that sermon, I said that there is a process, and it is very clear. It begins with humility, and then it leads to submission as an intelligent, conscious acceptance of God's will, and then to **obedience** as the action.

Finally after that comes honor; or exaltation would be another way of putting it. In this particular context it is expressed as "the healing of the land." Without recognition of God's sovereignty, that process never even gets started.

I said very early in this series on the Sovereignty of God (I do not know whether it was the first sermon, or the second. It was one of the two, when, at least to me, a recognition of the importance of this doctrine began to dawn on me) that I began to realize to a degree where this thing was headed. I said that I felt that this was the most important series that I have ever given in all of my ministry. The reason that I can see that this doctrine is central to the **application** of all of the others, is that Mr. Armstrong used to say, "*if a person is not ruled by God, they will not be in God's kingdom.*" Understanding this doctrine—God's sovereignty—gives one a multitude of reasons to submit to God. If we submit, it leads to the other things. Everything has to be in order. If the order is not correct, then it is not going to produce (in quantity or quality) what God wants.

**II Timothy 3:16-17** All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The sovereignty of God is a doctrine. Doctrine means teaching. Again, the way these things are listed, Paul gives a very strong indication that doctrine is listed first. Teaching is listed first because it is **basic** to everything else that follows. If there is not a foundation of teaching of doctrine, what do you have to work with? Of course we are assuming at this point that we are talking about **true doctrine**. If you do not have true doctrine, you have nothing to work with in relation to God.

What I am saying is that the specific doctrine of the Sovereignty of God is even more basic to everything else. It is fundamental to everything else that follows. It is through the teachings, or the doctrines of the Bible that the realities of God—of our relationship to Him, of our destiny, of Christ, of grace, of justification, sanctification, salvation, the holy spirit—that all of these things are made known. It is doctrine (teaching) in conjunction with the holy spirit that enables us to grow, to overcome, to be built up.

Now we will add another factor to this that is an important principle. We are just going to pull a phrase out of the book of Proverbs. The phrase is in verse 7 of Proverbs 23. But in order to get the context I think it is good to read the other verses that are really connected to it.

**Proverbs 23:6-8** Eat you not the bread of him that has an evil eye, neither desire you his dainty meats: For **as he thinks in his heart**, so is he: Eat and drink, says he to you; but his heart is not with you. The morsel which you have eaten shall you vomit up, and lose your sweet words.

This phrase, "as he thinks in his heart, so is he" applies both to the righteous and the evil. It happens to appear here, where the subject is evil. That can be translated (maybe this will be just a little bit clearer to you, it is a little bit more modern): "As he **calculates** in his soul..." The word "*calculate*" puts a twist in the word "*thinking*." It makes it a little bit stronger and almost gives you a sense of deceit—that the person is measuring you up for something.

The warning of all three verses together is against people who are exploitive. It is against people who are controllers—who do it in a really slick way. They manipulate you through charm, charming words, or whatever. What God says is that we better have enough discernment to look on the heart. What I want to get at here is this phrase, "As

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

he thinks in his heart, so is he." This is what is important to this sermon.

There is an inseparable connection between teaching and practice. We cannot really begin to **practice** truth until we are taught it. There are some things that we will pick up in our culture, because man does not do **everything** wrong. From time to time man, by sheer luck it seems, hits upon things that are **right**. This is why Paul (in Romans 2) talks about the conscience of those who are unconverted. There may be little or much in a given culture that is in harmony with God and His way.

So, as a man thinks in his heart—as he has been educated to think—is the way he really is. Doctrine becomes important because we really cannot go the way of God, within the framework of His purpose, until we begin to be taught the truth. Please do not lose the thought of the sovereignty of God, because something has to get us moving. Something has to make the application practical and to get us moving. The long and short of this is that the mind must be fed with right knowledge if it is going to do right as a way of life. That is what God is after, and that is why doctrine is so important.

This is why God says, "Train up a child in the way he **should** go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." It does not mean that the child is going to do everything right, but He is saying that the **basic** training of the child will never completely leave that child, and if the child is started off in the right way, "as the twig is bent, so grows the tree." It is a generality, but it is a **true** generality. What we need is truth. What we need is the doctrines put together in the right way so that they lead in the right direction—toward God's purpose.

What matters is the thinking material that the person is working with, because the means, or the fodder—the material that his mind (his heart)—is going to determine what he **calculates** with. If a person does not have truth, he is not going to produce the right things.

We will read a **very** familiar scripture from the New Testament:

**John 8:32** And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

What if a person never receives truth? We would have to conclude from John 8:32 that they never experience the freedom that Jesus is talking about here. Truth is the word of God. It does not mean that **all** truth is involved in the specific subject that Jesus is talking about. But again, the general principle applies.

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Specifically, in John 8:32, He is talking about the word of God—what is contained in the Bible. All scripture, or every scripture is **God-breathed**. It has its source in God; and Jesus, it is said, was **truth**. "I am the way, the **truth**, and the life."

The truth that is contained in the Bible primarily pertains to life's relationships. So, if a person is somehow denied the truth, he never gets to enjoy a life free from prejudice, free from the wiles of Satan, free from the power of evil, and **free** from the ignorance of God's purpose.

God begins this process by means of His calling, and the power to **free** us lies in the combination of two major factors—**faith** and **repentance**. Still, without the other doctrines, no freedom would be achieved because the truths of the Bible are contained within its doctrines, and they are like way stations along the way.

Recall again II Timothy 3:16: "All scripture (the word of God) is profitable for doctrine, [and that begins a process] for reproof, for instruction in righteousness..."—you see, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished.

The first thing that God must teach us is, what? That **He is**, because faith is the foundation of everything. Where does faith come from? Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Faith has its source in the revelation of God—His words about Himself. It is in the Book. The sovereignty of God is an aspect of faith, but it is more than that, because along with faith it links together the other steps in the process of salvation.

Recognition of God's sovereignty is *that* quality which turns ordinary belief, a mere acceptance, or an intellectual agreement, into practical **living** faith. The deeper the understanding (I mean the understanding of God's sovereignty) the **greater** the motivation to **turn** what one understands into practical works. Both aspects are needed. I mean the intellectual knowledge **and** the recognition *of* and submission *to* the sovereignty of God. The one without the other leaves a person weakened.

Knowledge without motivation to apply leaves the person with, what? A dead faith. They believe, but there is no motivation to go on.

Recognition of God's sovereignty, without a balanced understanding of doctrine, leaves a person all action without a corresponding understanding of **why**. Now I can name you a group of people who are like this—the Pentecostal Holiness People. They are all zealous, without a corresponding understanding of the "whys" of their religion.

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Based upon what happened when the WCG changed many of its doctrines so radically, I feel that many of our people have the tendency to fall into that same general category. Very many people did not seem to understand the doctrinal changes or where belief in those doctrines would lead.

Today, if when we examine the church of God scene, there are still very many people who are greatly confused about what they are supposed to believe. It makes the church—the greater church of God—a body virtually helpless to face the rising tide of immorality, because there is so little conviction.

**II Timothy 4:1-5** I charge you therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch you in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry.

I think we are in one of these times when people will not endure sound doctrine. Very many are seeking what amounts to nothing more than spiritual and moral ease, where they can feel comfortable rather than challenged—to feel like they are coming home, rather than on a rough, tough journey to perfection, toward the Kingdom of God.

The sovereignty of God issue is **super** important. I used this phrase earlier—it "links" what is merely intellectual to practical application. Do you know why? Because it is a teaching that reaches the heart, and it sets our emotions working toward the same conclusion that God has in mind.

One author, whose name is Arthur Pink, became quite flowery in his description in a summation of the importance of this doctrine as seen in the following quote:

The doctrine of God's sovereignty lies at the foundation of Christian theology, and in importance is second only to the divine inspiration of the scriptures. It is the center of gravity in the system of Christian truth, the sun around which the lesser orbs are grouped. It is the golden milestone to which every highway of knowledge leads, and from which they all radiate. It is the cord upon which all other doctrines are strung, like so many pearls, holding

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

them in place and giving them unity. It is the plumb line by which every creed needs to be measured, the balance in which every human dogma must be weighed. It is designed as the sheet-anchor for our souls amid the storms of life.

It is designed and adapted to mold the affections of the heart and to give a right direction to conduct. It produces gratitude in prosperity, and patience in adversity. It affords comfort for the present, and a sense of security respecting the unknown future. It is, and it does all, and much more than we have said, because it ascribes to God the glory which is His due, and places the creature in his proper place before Him in the dust.

Today we are going to look more specifically at the **value** of this doctrine. The last sermon was on the attitudes that should be produced **because of** this doctrine, but this one is going to be on the **value**. During the course of this sermon I am going to be touching on some of the points that were discussed in earlier sermons.

What I am going to do here verbally is outline a variety of points by giving you a specific heading for a section, and then giving a scripture or two, and maybe some brief expounding. But I want you to have something that you can refer to in the future, and maybe study out a great deal more than I am giving you in just a very brief overview.

## **Value of the Sovereignty of God Doctrine**

**I. The Sovereignty of God doctrine is of value because it exalts the absolute supremacy of God, and therefore our veneration of Him.**

**God is supreme because He is the Creator and has rights on that basis.**

We are going to turn to I Corinthians 8 for a succinct statement that is made in regard to God. Paul writes:

**I Corinthians 8:6** But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

God is Creator and He is unchallenged in that position. Acts 17 is Paul's address there

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

in Athens.

**Acts 17:23-24** For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOOD. Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you: [Now notice **this** statement] "God that made the world and all things therein. . .

He is creator. Everything belongs to Him, and by right of creation He can do **anything** He wants to do, with anybody, at any time. That includes entire nations, or the whole thing. So be it. It is His.

**Acts 17:24-26** . . .seeing that He is LOORD of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands: Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needs anything, seeing he gives to all life, and breath, and all things. [He not only creates everything, He keeps everything going. **Everything!**] And has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.

He put nations and peoples where He wants them, when He wants them. We are to understand that He is **unchallenged** in what He determines to do. The trouble is that man always wants to argue with God.

**Acts 17:27-31** That they should seek the LOORD, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being: as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent: Because he has appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead.

I think that this second reference here is especially interesting, because it is addressed to unconverted Gentiles **unfamiliar** with the Old Testament, and Paul addresses them on the basis of God as creator, sovereignly involved in all the affairs of men—even

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

those with whom He has made no covenant. If we ever get the idea that God is not involved with our lives, or that He does not know what is going on, or that He is unaware of the trouble that we are going through, we had better re-think things in a hurry. He knows what is going on—even to the sparrow that falls.

**B. The Sovereignty of God is of value because it declares God's right on the basis of His being potter.**

He is the potter, not just the creator. He is the potter shaping everything.

**Revelation 4:11** You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for you have created all things, and for **your** pleasure they are and were created.

The potter can do anything He wants. Now do you see what this doctrine is doing? It puts everything in this relationship between God and man in their proper position so that we have a **sound** basis for putting into action the things that He requires of us—the things that we are responsible for.

In Romans, the 9th chapter, Paul expands on this more:

**Romans 9:15** For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

Everything is for His pleasure.

**Romans 9:16-17** So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy. For the scripture says unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show my power in you. [There was His pleasure.] That My name might be declared through all the earth.

There is His pleasure. Therefore He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and on whom He wills, He **hardens**. That is one we do not like to think of.

**Romans 9:19-21** You will say then unto me, Why does He yet find fault? For

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

who has resisted His will? No, but O man, who are you that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?

I wonder if He had Jacob and Esau in mind? Of the same lump? Even before they are born, He has chosen one over the other. Who is going to argue with God?

**Romans 9:22** What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.

That is another thing we do not like to think of in relation to God—that He would actually **fit** people to destruction.

**Romans 9:23-26** And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he has called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he says also in Hosea, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, You are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

Now this is of special importance to us, because unless we understand that we have no right to reply against Him for what He does and/or permits, and reverently submit to Him, we will never regard His sovereignty, and never truly honor Him, and never be at peace. We will always be in a state of discontentment.

We will almost constantly be tilting at windmills, like Don Quixote—being impatient, critical of others, getting into arguments, being offended, griping, seeking vindication before men. The around and the about will seem very important, and the immediate along with that, because people do not really think that God is sovereign over **everything**, and that everything really is under control. Think about it.

**C. The Sovereignty of God is of value because it makes known the irreversibility of His will.**

There is an **astounding** statement in Acts 15. This took place when James was summing up and giving a conclusion to the disputes there in the big conference in Acts. In verse 14, James says:

**Acts 15:14-18** Simeon has declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets: as it is written. After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, says the Lord, who does all these things. Known unto God are **all His works** from the beginning of the world.

Let that sink in. "Known unto God are **all His works** from the **beginning** of the world." Brethren, that is such a **staggering** concept. It is incomprehensible to my finite mind. I find it impossible to describe how He could absolutely know beforehand everything that He wanted to do over a 7,000-year period of history, considering the billions of people who have lived. We can begin to understand because when we decide we want to construct something, do we not make plans in advance?

We draw up blueprints and we try to arrange things in order so that we understand step-by-step-by-step the process we need to go through in order to complete the project and bring forth the product we have in mind. Now that is a tiny thing by comparison to dealing with perhaps 40 or 50 billion people. But, I think that gives us some sort of an idea, and that is the only way that I am able to understand it.

If I can put it into a concrete construction area context, I can understand it a bit; but I have a hard time when the numbers begin to become so large, and the complexity of all the operations of those people...Oh well, we will just leave it. I wrote myself a note, and maybe this is right, that in order to understand even some of this I have to rationalize that the scripture really does not mean what it says. But then if I do that, I am not being true to God's word. How can we reverse the mind of something so great? Oh boy!

**Ephesians 1:3-5** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

**Ephesians 1:9-11** Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will.

That at least gives us a general view—it is to this end that He created the world. He formed man and knew that man would sin, because it says in Peter that Christ was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world. They had that already worked out. We will just drop that subject there because it begins to get too big and too complex.

Now to Point D. This point goes hand-in-glove with Point C.

**D. The Sovereignty of God doctrine is of value because it reveals the inscrutability of God's wisdom.**

**Isaiah 55:8-9** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

**Romans 11:33** O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

Inscrutable means "impenetrable." It means "incomprehensible," "unfathomable." Here the Bible, inspired by God, states that His ways are past finding out. They are beyond us. It means that there are elements about the way that He does things that we can only inadequately answer with our finite mind. While the Bible shows that God is immaculate in His holiness, He nonetheless permitted evil to enter His creation. We have to ask ourselves—"Why?" Why does He think this way?

Even though God is almighty in power, He allows Satan to make war against His purpose, and though He is the God of all grace and mercy, and perfect in love, yet He spared not His own Son. Though He says He is not willing that any should perish, the Bible also shows people being burned in the lake of fire. There are things that are beyond us—things of this nature that reach down into our individual lives—and when we

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

begin to think on these things, we are left, asking "Why?" And that is the best that we can usually come up with.

Although that might be quite unsatisfactory at the time, and the specific reasons may never be revealed until long after our death. Maybe many of the things that happened to us will not be known until after the second resurrection occurs—then we will know. But there is enough revealed that assures that far more good is achieved God's way than would ever be accomplished by doing it the way **we** think is right. If we had our way, if we had our will, things would not work out. Now, if you understand God's sovereignty, you will accept that, and go on and be content.

### **E. The Sovereignty of God doctrine is of value because it magnifies God's grace.**

Much can be said in order to more specifically define grace as the Bible intends that we understand. But I think that an adequate short definition is that it means, "unmerited"—that is, "unearned" or "undeserved favor."

What this doctrine teaches us is that we have no claim on God. A simple way of saying this: He does not owe us a thing. In fact, the right understanding is that we owe Him *everything*. He has a claim on us for everything.

Now therefore, because it is this way—this is our reality—grace is therefore **free**. Because grace is given to those who are destitute of worthiness, grace is **sovereign**. Now what grace teaches us—what this doctrine teaches us about grace—is that God gives it to whom **He** pleases.

Therefore, all that constrains Him, all that moves Him, all that **forces** Him or motivates Him to choose one particular person and not another—all that constrains Him to bestow this unearned, unmerited, undeserved grace—is completely and totally within Himself.

In other words, we cannot look at it as though He called us because He needed us—**any of us**. I do not care who it was. He did not need Peter. There may have been a billion Peters, or Pauls. Do you get the point? He does not need anybody, and He never reveals other than the fact that we need what He is able to give us—that is the reason we understand, and so it is freely given by Him.

That is what makes grace free. It is freely given. So everything is totally within Himself in regard to this. He has ordained, by the very fact that there is going to be a lake of fire

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and scripture reveals people being consumed in it, that some are **ordained** to that destiny. That is hard to accept.

God gives grace and draws men into a relationship with Him and into His kingdom as a monument to His *inscrutable* favor. It is incomprehensible. So sovereignty reveals God breaking down the opposition of our nature and subduing our enmity, because **He first loved us**. That is what we have to keep in mind. The only reason we love Him, is that He first loved us.

## **II. The Sovereignty of God doctrine is of value because it destroys any possibility of salvation by works.**

This is the corollary of the previous point, but in this one the thought regarding sovereignty is that it carries all the way through the entire process. Whereas, the unearned grace is thought of as Him revealing Himself to us and starting us down the road. But in this thought it carries all the way through.

I am going to give you a verse that everyone of us probably knows: Proverbs 14:12, which says that "There is a way that seems right unto **man**, but the end thereof are the ways of death." The way that seems right, regarding salvation, to human nature is that we earn it through our efforts. Human nature operates on the thought that God owes us. This concept allows human nature to exalt itself at virtually every turn.

We have already read Romans 8:16. and we are not going to go back to it. But, in that verse Paul says, "It is not of him who wills, or of him who runs." It is the word "runs" that I am thinking of right here because "run" extends the thought from beyond a mere calling from God. This word considers the remainder of the process as we proceed along the course of our pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God.

Works do not save us, but they are necessary in the mix of things, because they serve an entirely different set of purposes. We are not going to go into that.

Let me ask a question: Why do you think that God took Israel to the Promised Land by way of a wilderness? He took them into a desolate area that provided no means for supporting themselves, except for a very short period of time. Any extensive period of time, and they would all have died out there...except that God was with them.

What was God doing? He was putting something down in the Book from their experiences so that you and I, when we came along (when the church was formed), would understand that Israel went through the wilderness. They went from their release

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

from Egypt and their slavery all the way to their inheritance. All along the way God was giving them **grace**.

If they had to depend on their own works, **they all would have died there!** The reason that nobody was living out there was because the wilderness will not support life. That is why God took them there.

He wants to impress upon **your mind** and **my mind** that He gives us grace not only at the time of our calling, but also every step of the way—the **whole way** into His kingdom, into our inheritance. We would not survive without what He supplies.

So, all along the way He gave them water. He gave them food—manna. He fought their battles. He gave them His law—the way to live. And on and on and on.

Remember Paul wrote in I Corinthians 10 that all these things were done as examples for us, upon whom the end of the ages are come?

There is the lesson in this. Do you understand that the Old Testament contains **the** big lesson of the Feast of Tabernacles? Read it yourself. But despite the condition that they were in, God was supplying their needs. The *succoth* (the booths) represented their weakened position. They had nothing to protect them and they soon would have been dead.

There is a saying that God helps those who help themselves. But that saying misses the point entirely in regard to salvation. God undoubtedly helps those responsible enough to use their gift to obey Him, but in terms of salvation, God helps those who are unable to help themselves. I want you to think seriously about this. Could 2½ million people have survived out in that wilderness? I mean regardless of how hard they worked? If they were in the wilderness, would that place have supported their life? Brethren, after **three days** they were crying for water!

Do you get the point? There is **no** way—there is nothing we can do to earn salvation, because right now, brethren, we are in the wilderness. Unless He does what we need, we will not survive. And He **will do** what we need.

This has a way of driving human nature to despair, because it is very uncomfortable being obligated or totally at the mercy of somebody else. To human nature this is just another form of slavery that it does not want to be subject to. But **that** is just the point. It is not until the holy spirit totally convicts us that there is **no** help in ourselves that we will turn to God to seek what He can give us.

We cannot possibly work this out, and when we recognize that we are truly lost, then we will surrender unconditionally, and He will help those who are unable to help themselves. When we throw ourselves into His arms, into His sovereign mercy, then things will begin to go right internally—in the heart. When a person does that, guilt begins to evaporate, the hopelessness beginning to dissolve, and it is replaced by vision.

Fear gives way to confidence, and then a restless, discontented and critical negativism is supplanted by peace and joy. How do I know all this? Because Psalm 23 says, "The Lord is my shepherd. [I have given myself into His hand.] I shall not lack [regardless of where we are]. He leads me, He guides me ..."

So, we are to learn then that it is not our works as a follower of the Shepherd, but that which the Shepherd provides that gives us this security and safety.

### **III. The Sovereignty of God doctrine is of value because it is deeply humbling to us.**

I Corinthians 1:26-31 says at the end of this that God does what He does "that no man should glory in His presence," because that will not promote a good relationship with Him. If we do not have a good relationship with Him, we are not going to grow, we are not going to overcome, because we are not going to be humble (that is the one that He says that He looks to).

The Sovereignty of God issue, when it is understood, is like a battering ram to human pride.

The spirit of this age (I mean if there has ever been an age when men have taken pride in what they are able to do. "Oh! We can go to the moon!" Science is glorified)... We have all the world worshipping at the shrine of man's accomplishments. But you see, what this doctrine does is that it reveals who is really in **control**, and it especially reveals who is in control of the most important aspect in all of life.

**John 1:12-13** But as many as received him, to them **He** gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh [notice that], nor of the will of man, but of God.

Nothing touching the will of man has anything to do with our being empowered to be in

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

this position. But again, human nature, because of its vanity, wants to feel as though it has contributed something toward the price of redemption, so it will be able to boast. We cannot honestly acknowledge this before God.

I just want to pick out one phrase in Psalm 87:7. The whole Psalm leads up to that final phrase where the psalmist says:

**Psalm 87:7** All my springs are in You.

**Springs** is the metaphor that is used for resources. Spring normally is a resource for water. What the psalmist is saying is that all the sources of life and joy are from God, both physically and spiritually. We simply draw on what He supplies.

In other places God refers to Himself as the "fountain of life." Again, there is another brief chapter in the book of Isaiah, chapter 12:1-6 where He refers to Himself as a "well" from which we draw strength.

**Psalm 115:1** Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us [man], but unto your name give glory, for your mercy, and for your truth's sake.

Consider this: If by nature we are children of wrath (Ephesians 2:1) and by practice we are rebels against God's government (Romans 8:7), we have justly earned the curse of the law. The wages of sin is death. God is under no obligation to rescue us from what we deserve; rather, He delivered up His Son for us. What should that do to us? It should, you know, if we are really thinking and being led by God and His spirit—it should melt our heart and force us to say, "By the grace of God I am what I am." Just remember, human nature does not want to honestly face up to that. It will deceitfully fight it all the time.

#### **IV. The Sovereignty of God doctrine is of value because it supplies the solid foundation of true religion.**

I think that we ought to understand this, because when the doctrine of God's sovereignty reaches its rightful place in our mind, it begins to link all the other doctrines together and gives motivation for us to move—to get off dead-center—because we begin to recognize His greatness. And not only that, but for some reason entirely within Him, He has chosen us! Why? We do not know. It is inscrutable. But you see, once this is in place, then it provides the foundation for going on.

What is our destiny? It is to be conformed to the image of His Son; and His Son, our elder brother, said that it was His "meat" to do the will of God. That is what energized Him. That is what sustained Him—just like food does for us.

Religion can be defined as "a way of life," and His (Jesus') way of life was always to do those things that pleased His Father, and our will ought to be to follow in His steps. So there it is. If religion is a way of life, then the life of Jesus becomes the model, and therefore our religion—our way of life—is to do what He did. He acknowledged God's sovereignty by always doing that which pleased the Father.

#### **V. The Sovereignty of God doctrine gives a sense of absolute security.**

This is a scary world. It is getting scarier and scarier. But hey! God is infinite power! There is nothing and no one that can withstand His will or the outworking of His purpose. I will add one word, a pronoun, to that statement that God is infinite power.

I will let you answer this for yourself. Can you say, "**My** God is infinite power?" We can add even more. We can also say, "My God is infinite wisdom. He is infinite judgment. He is infinite love. He is infinite mercy and goodness."

Indeed He is infinite **everything** that can be called good. There is a beautiful verse in Deuteronomy 33:26. Moses says:

**Deuteronomy 33:26** There is **none** like unto the God of Jeshurun [Israel], who rides upon the heaven in your help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before you; and shall say, Destroy them.

Absolute infinite security. It was thoughts of this nature that led the psalmist to write in Psalm 91 all those wonderful things that are promised. You can look that one up (Psalm 91:1-9). I think that we can understand that there is hyperbole there, without losing our faith. The promises there should not be taken in an absolute sense because it may not be God's will to deliver **you** at any particular time.

God's will for the individual has to be fed into that in any given situation. God wants us to understand that He is with us through thick and thin, and that His major concern is getting us through to the end of **His** preparations for us—not the end as we might like it to be, or think it ought to be, but the end of His preparations for us. So here we are,

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

senseless sheep, and yet we are secure because we are in the hands of the Shepherd Christ, and all power in heaven and earth is His. You can read in II Timothy 1:12 that He is almighty.

Now there is one final one, but I am not going to go into it. You can write it down.

## **VI. The Sovereignty of God doctrine is of value because it greatly aids us in being resigned to God's will.**

I want you to understand that when I speak of being resigned, I am not speaking of a fatalistic acquiescence, because according to Romans 12:2, we are to prove what is that good and acceptable perfect will of God. There are plenty of examples in the Bible.

You could really pile them up. Some of the great men and women in the past have accepted God's will. They **proved** that it was God's will that such and such occur, and once they got the picture, they accepted it. They did not complain one bit. A clear example is Aaron in Leviticus 10, when his two sons were struck down. It says, "Aaron held his peace."

He knew his sons deserved it. He did not gripe and murmur and complain against God. He accepted it. The same can be said of David.

In II Samuel 15, when his own son Absalom was rebelling against him and drove him out, and Zadok appeared with the Ark, and Zadok asked David, "What am I going to do with this?" David said, "Take it back. The ark belongs in Jerusalem." David said that, not knowing whether he would ever see it again, whether he would ever see Jerusalem again, or whether he would ever see the tabernacle again. He did not know how this thing with his son was going to work out.

We know how it worked out. But at that point, apparently without reluctance at all, David said, "*Take it back. Let God's will be done.*" As a military leader and a king, David might have said, "*Boy! If we have the ark, we have it! It is going to give us victory!*" But David knew that would be mere superstition. If it was not God's will for them to win, what good was it?

What was more important was understanding God's will. So David said, "I do not know, but it belongs back in Jerusalem." So he gave it up. Now the others who were unconverted, they would have said, "*Yea! Yea! We have the ark! Keep it!*" But not David.

We could go on and on, but let me repeat these points:

The Sovereignty of God (Part 11) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

- I. It exalts the supremacy of God, and therefore our veneration of Him.
- II. It destroys any possibility of salvation by works.
- III. It is deeply humbling to us.
- IV. It provides a solid foundation for true religion.
- V. It gives absolute security.
- VI. It greatly aids us to be resigned to God's will.