

THE
SOVEREIGNTY
OF
GOD

A. W. PINK



WHITAKER
HOUSE

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. Scripture quotations marked (rv) are taken from the Revised Version of the Holy Bible.

Boldface type in the Scripture quotations indicates the author's emphasis.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

ISBN: 978-1-62911-742-3
eBook ISBN: 978-1-62911-743-0
Printed in the United States of America
© 2016 by Whitaker House

Whitaker House
1030 Hunt Valley Circle
New Kensington, PA 15068
www.whitakerhouse.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Pink, Arthur Walkington, 1886–1952.
Title: The sovereignty of God / by A.W. PINK.
Description: New Kensington, PA : Whitaker House, 2016.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016037840 | ISBN 9781629117423 (trade pbk. : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Providence and government of God—Christianity.
Classification: LCC BT135 .P5 2016 | DDC 231.7—dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016037840>

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical—including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system—without permission in writing from the publisher. Please direct your inquiries to permissionseditor@whitakerhouse.com.

CONTENTS

Preface to the First – A. W. Pink.....	5
Preface to the Second Edition – A. W. Pink	8
Preface to the Third Edition – A. W. Pink.....	11
Preface to the Fourth Edition – I. C. Herendeen	13
Introduction	14
1. God's Sovereignty Defined.....	25
2. The Sovereignty of God in Creation.....	37
3. The Sovereignty of God in Administration	43
4. The Sovereignty of God in Salvation.....	63
5. The Sovereignty of God in Reprobation	103
6. The Sovereignty of God in Operation	141
7. God's Sovereignty and the Human Will.....	163

8. Sovereignty and Human Responsibility.....	185
9. God's Sovereignty and Prayer.....	212
10. Our Attitude Toward His Sovereignty	229
11. Difficulties and Objections	247
12. The Value of This Doctrine	273
Conclusion.....	293
Appendix 1: The Will of God.....	312
Appendix 2: The Case of Adam	318
Appendix 3: The Meaning of Kosmos in John 3:16	326
Appendix 4: 1 John 2:2	330
About the Author	336

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

In the following pages an attempt has been made to examine anew in the light of God's Word some of the profoundest questions which can engage the human mind. Others have grappled with these mighty problems in days gone by and from their labors we are the gainers. While making no claim for originality the writer, nevertheless, has endeavored to examine and deal with his subject from an entirely independent viewpoint. We have studied diligently the writings of such men as Augustine and Aquinas, Calvin and Melanethon, Jonathan Edwards and Ralph Erskine, Andrew Fuller and Robert Haldane.¹ And sad it is to think that these eminent and honored names are almost entirely unknown to the present generation. Though, of course, we do not endorse all their

1. Among those who have dealt most helpfully with the subject of God's sovereignty in recent years we mention Drs. Rice, J. B. Moody, and George S. Bishop, from whose writings we have also received instruction.

conclusions, yet we gladly acknowledge our deep indebtedness to their works. We have purposely refrained from quoting freely from these deeply taught theologians, because we desired that the faith of our readers should stand not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. For this reason we have quoted freely from the Scriptures and have sought to furnish proof-texts for every statement we have advanced.

It would be foolish for us to expect that this work will meet with general approval. The trend of modern theology—if theology it can be called—is ever toward the deification of the creature rather than the glorification of the Creator, and the leaven of present-day rationalism is rapidly permeating the whole of Christendom. The malevolent effects of Darwinianism are more far reaching than most are aware. Many of those among our religious leaders who are still regarded as orthodox would, we fear, be found to be very heterodox if they were weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. Even those who are clear intellectually, upon other truths, are rarely sound in doctrine. Few, very few, today, really believe in the complete ruin and total depravity of man. Those who speak of man's "free will," and insist upon his inherent power to either accept or reject the Savior, do but voice their ignorance of the real condition of Adam's fallen children. And if there are few who believe that, so far as he is concerned, the condition of the sinner is entirely hopeless, there are fewer still who really believe in the absolute sovereignty of God.

In addition to the widespread effects of unscriptural teaching, we also have to reckon with the deplorable superficiality of the present generation. To announce that a certain book is a treatise on doctrine is quite sufficient to prejudice against it the great bulk of church members and most of our

preachers as well. The craving today is for something light and spicy, and few have patience, still less desire, to examine carefully that which would make a demand both upon their hearts and their mental powers. We remember, also, how that it is becoming increasingly difficult in these strenuous days for those who are desirous of studying the deeper things of God to find the time which such study requires. Yet, it is still true that “Where there’s a will, there’s a way,” and in spite of the discouraging features referred to, we believe there is even now a godly remnant who will take pleasure in giving this little work a careful consideration, and such will, we trust, find in it *“meat in due season”* (Psalm 145:15).

We do not forget the words of one long since passed away, namely, that “Denunciation is the last resort of a defeated opponent.” To dismiss this book with the contemptuous epithet—“Hyper-Calvinism!” will not be worthy of notice. For controversy we have no taste, and we shall not accept any challenge to enter the lists against those who might desire to debate the truths discussed in these pages. So far as our personal reputation is concerned, that we leave our Lord to take care of, and unto Him we would now commit this volume and whatever fruit it may bear, praying Him to use it for the enlightening of His own dear people (insofar as it is in accord with His Holy Word) and to pardon the writer for and preserve the reader from the injurious effects of any false teaching that may have crept into it. If the joy and comfort which have come to the author while penning these pages are shared by those who may scan them, then we shall be devoutly thankful to the One whose grace alone enables us to discern spiritual things.

—Arthur W. Pink
June 1918

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is now two years since the first edition of this work was presented to the Christian public. Its reception has been far more favorable than the author had expected. Many have notified him of the help and blessing received from a perusal of his attempts to expound what is admittedly a difficult subject. For every word of appreciation we return hearty thanks to Him in Whose light we alone “see light.” A few have condemned the book in unqualified terms, and these we commend to God and to the Word of His grace, remembering that it is written, “*a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven*” (John 3:27). Others have sent friendly criticisms and these have been weighed carefully, and we trust that, in consequence, this revised edition will be unto those who are members of the household of faith more profitable than the former one.

One word of explanation seems to be called for. A number of respected brethren in Christ felt that our treatment of the sovereignty of God was too extreme and one-sided. It has been pointed out that a fundamental requirement in expounding the Word of God is the need of preserving the balance of truth. With this we are in hearty accord. Two things are beyond dispute: God is sovereign, and man is a responsible creature. But in this book we are treating of the sovereignty of God, and while the responsibility of man is readily owned, yet, we do not pause on every page to insist on it; instead, we have sought to stress that side of the truth which in these days is almost universally neglected. Probably 95 percent 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 ones 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 pretends to deal with one side of the truth and that is, the neglected side, the divine side. Furthermore, the question might be raised: Which is the more to be deplored—an over emphasizing of the human side and an insufficient emphasis on the divine side, or, an over emphasizing of the divine side and an insufficient emphasis on the human side? Surely, if we err at

all it is on the right side. Surely, there is far more danger of making too much of man and too little of God, than there is of making too much of God and too little of man. Yea, the question might well be asked, can we press God's claims too far? Can we be too extreme in insisting upon the absoluteness and universality of the sovereignty of God?

It is with profound thankfulness to God that, after a further two years diligent study of Holy Writ, with the earnest desire to discover what almighty God has been pleased to reveal to His children on this subject, we are able to testify that we see no reason for making any retractions from what we wrote before, and while we have rearranged the material of this work, the substance and doctrine of it remains unchanged. May the One who condescended to bless the first edition of this work be pleased to own even more widely this revision.

—*Arthur W. Pink*
Swengel, Pennsylvania, 1921

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

That a third edition of this work is now called for, is a cause of fervent praise to God. As the darkness deepens and the pretensions of men are taking on an ever-increasing blatancy, the need becomes greater for the claims of God to be emphasized. As the twentieth century Babel of religious tongues is bewildering so many, the duty of God's servants to point to the one sure anchorage for the heart, is the more apparent. Nothing is so tranquilizing and so stabilizing as the assurance that the Lord Himself is on the throne of the universe, "*working all things after the counsel of his own will*" (Ephesians 1:11).

The Holy Spirit has told us that there are in the Scriptures some things hard to be understood," but mark it is "hard" not "impossible!" A patient waiting on the Lord, a diligent comparison of Scripture with Scripture, often issues in a fuller apprehension of that which before was obscure to us. During the last ten years it has pleased God to grant us further light

on certain parts of His Word, and this we have sought to use in improving our expositions of different passages. But it is with unfeigned thanksgiving that we find it unnecessary to either change or modify any doctrine contained in the former editions. Yea, as time goes by, we realize (by divine grace) with ever-increasing force, the truth, the importance, and the value of the sovereignty of God as it pertains to every branch of our lives.

Our hearts have been made to rejoice again and again by unsolicited letters that have come to hand from every quarter of the earth, telling of help and blessing received from the former editions of this work. One Christian friend was so stirred by reading it and so impressed by its testimony, that a check was sent to be used in sending free copies to missionaries in fifty foreign countries, "that its glorious message may encircle the globe"; numbers of whom have written us to say how much they have been strengthened in their fight with the powers of darkness. To God alone belongs all the glory. May He deign to use this third edition to the honor of His own great name, and to the feeding of His scattered and starved sheep.

—*Arthur W. Pink*
Morton's Gap, Kentucky, 1929

FOREWORD TO THE FOURTH EDITION

It is with profound praise to “God most high” that another edition of this valuable and helpful book is now called for. Though its teaching runs directly counter to that which is being promulgated on every hand today, yet we are happy to be able to say that its circulation is increasing to the strengthening of the faith, comfort and hope of an increasing number of God’s elect. We commit this new edition to Him whom we “delight to honor,” praying that He may be pleased to bless its circulation to the enlightening of many more of His own, to the “*praise of the glory of his grace*” (Ephesians 1:6), and a clearer apprehension of the majesty of God and His sovereign mercy.

—I. C. Herendeen

First publisher of A. W. Pink books, 1949

INTRODUCTION

Who is regulating affairs on this earth today—God or the devil? That God reigns supreme in heaven is generally conceded; that He does so over this world, is almost universally denied—if not directly, then indirectly. More and more are men in their philosophizing and theorizing relegating God to the background. Take the material realm. Not only is it denied that God created everything by personal and direct action, but few believe that He has any immediate concern in regulating the works of His own hands. Everything is supposed to be ordered according to the (impersonal and abstract) “laws of nature.” Thus is the Creator banished from His own creation. Therefore we need not be surprised that men, in their degrading conceptions, exclude Him from the realm of human affairs. Throughout Christendom, with an almost negligible exception, the theory is held that man is “a free agent,” and therefore, lord of his fortunes and the determiner of his

destiny. That Satan is to be blamed for much of the evil that is in the world is freely affirmed by those who, though having so much to say about “the responsibility of man,” often deny their own responsibility, by attributing to the devil what, in fact, proceeds from their own evil hearts. (See Mark 7:21–23.)

But who is regulating affairs on this earth today—God, or the devil? Attempt to take a serious and comprehensive view of the world. What a scene of confusion and chaos confronts us on every side! Sin is rampant; lawlessness abounds; evil men and seducers are waxing “*worse and worse*” (2 Timothy 3:13). Today, everything appears to be out of joint. Thrones are creaking and tottering, ancient dynasties are being overturned, democracies are revolting, civilization is a demonstrated failure; half of Christendom was but recently locked together in a death grapple; and now that the titanic conflict is over, instead of the world having been made “safe for democracy,” we have discovered that democracy is very unsafe for the world. Unrest, discontent, and lawlessness are rife everywhere, and none can say how soon another great war will be set in motion. Statesmen are perplexed and staggered. Men’s hearts are “*failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth*” (Luke 21:26). Do these things look as though God had full control?

But let us confine our attention to the religious realm. After nineteen centuries of gospel preaching, Christ is still “*despised and rejected of men*” (Isaiah 53:3). Worse still, He (the Christ of Scripture) is proclaimed and magnified by very few. In the majority of modern pulpits He is dishonored and disowned. Despite frantic efforts to attract the crowds, the majority of the churches are being emptied rather than filled.

And what of the great masses of non-church goers? In the light of Scripture we are compelled to believe that the “many” are on the broad road that leads to destruction, and that only “few” are on the narrow way that leads unto life. Many are declaring that Christianity is a failure, and despair is settling on many faces. Not a few of the Lord’s own people are bewildered, and their faith is being severely tried. And what of God? Does He see and hear? Is He impotent or indifferent? A number of those who are regarded as leaders of Christian-thought told us that God could not help the coming of the late awful War, and that He was unable to bring about its termination. It was said, and said openly, that conditions were beyond God’s control. Do these things look as though God were ruling the world?

Who is regulating affairs on this earth today—God, or the devil? What impression is made upon the minds of those men of the world who, occasionally, attend a gospel service? What are the conceptions formed by those who hear even those preachers who are counted as “orthodox?” Is it not that a disappointed God is the One whom Christians believe in? From what is heard from the average evangelist today, is not any serious hearer obliged to conclude that he professes to represent a God who is filled with benevolent intentions, yet unable to carry them out; that He is earnestly desirous of blessing men, but that they will not let Him? Then, must not the average hearer draw the inference that the devil has gained the upper hand, and that God is to be pitied rather than blamed?

But does not everything seem to show that the devil has far more to do with the affairs of earth than God has? Ah, it

all depends upon whether we are walking by faith, or walking by sight. Are your thoughts, my reader, concerning this world and God's relation to it, based upon what you see? Face this question seriously and honestly. And if you are a Christian you will, most probably, have cause to bow your head with shame and sorrow, and to acknowledge that it is so. Alas, in reality, we walk very little "by faith." But what does "walking by faith" signify? It means that our thoughts are formed, our actions regulated, our lives molded by the Holy Scriptures, for, *"faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17). It is from the Word of Truth, and that alone, that we can learn what is God's relation to this world.

Who is regulating affairs on this earth today—God or the devil? What do the Scriptures say? Before we consider the direct reply to this query, let it be said that the Scriptures predicted just what we now see and hear. The prophecy of Jude is in course of fulfilment. It would lead us too far astray from our present inquiry to fully amplify this assertion, but what we have particularly in mind is a sentence in verse 8, *"Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion and speak evil of dignities."* Yes, they "speak evil" of the Supreme Dignity, the *"only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords"* (1 Timothy 6:15). Ours is peculiarly an age of irreverence, and as the consequence, the spirit of lawlessness, which brooks no restraint and which is desirous of casting off everything that interferes with the free course of self-will, is rapidly engulfing the earth like some giant tidal wave. The members of the rising generation are the most flagrant offenders, and in the decay and disappearing of parental authority we have the certain precursor of the abolition of civic authority. Therefore, in view of the growing disrespect for human law and the refusal

to “render honor to whom honor is due” (see Romans 13:7), we need not be surprised that the recognition of the majesty, the authority, the sovereignty of the almighty Lawgiver should recede more and more into the background, and the masses have less and less patience with those who insist upon them. And conditions will not improve; instead, the more sure Word of prophecy makes known to us that they will grow worse and worse. Nor do we expect to be able to stem the tide—it has already risen much too high for that. All we can now hope to do is warn our fellow-saints against the spirit of the age, and thus seek to counteract its baneful influence upon them.

Who is regulating affairs on this earth today—God, or the devil? What do the Scriptures say? If we believe their plain and positive declarations, no room is left for uncertainty. They affirm, again and again, that God is on the throne of the universe; that the scepter is in His hands; that He is directing all things “*after the counsel of his own will*” (Ephesians 1:11). They affirm, not only that God created all things, but also that God is ruling and reigning over all the works of His hands. They affirm that God is the “Almighty,” that His will is irreversible, that He is absolute sovereign in every realm of all His vast dominions. And surely it must be so. Only two alternatives are possible: God must either rule, or be ruled; sway, or be swayed; accomplish His own will, or be thwarted by His creatures. Accepting the fact that He is the “Most High,” the only Potentate and King of kings, vested with perfect wisdom and illimitable power, and the conclusion is irresistible that He must be God in fact as well as in name.

It is in view of what we have briefly referred to above that we say, present-day conditions call loudly for a new

examination and new presentation of God's omnipotence, God's sufficiency, God's sovereignty. From every pulpit in the land it needs to be thundered forth that God still lives, that God still observes, that God still reigns. Faith is now in the crucible, it is being tested by fire, and there is no fixed and sufficient resting place for the heart and mind but in the throne of God. What is needed now, as never before, is a full, positive, constructive setting forth of the Godhood of God. Drastic diseases call for drastic remedies. People are weary of platitudes and mere generalizations—the call is for something definite and specific. Soothing syrup may serve for peevish children, but an iron tonic is better suited for adults, and we know of nothing that is more calculated to infuse spiritual vigor into our frames than a scriptural apprehension of the full character of God. It is written, *"The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits"* (Daniel 11:32).

Without a doubt a world crisis is at hand, and everywhere men are alarmed. But God is not! He is never taken by surprise. It is no unexpected emergency which now confronts Him, for He is the One who *"worketh all things after the counsel of his own will"* (Ephesians 1:11). Hence, though the world is panic-stricken, the word to the believer is, "Fear not!" *"All things"* are subject to His immediate control: *"all things"* are moving in accord with His eternal purpose, and therefore *"all things"* are *"working together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (Romans 8:28). It must be so, for *"of him, and through him, and to him, are all things"* (Romans 11:36). Yet how little is this realized today even by the people of God! Many suppose that He is little more than a far-distant Spectator, taking no immediate hand in the affairs of earth. It is true that man is endowed

with power, but God is all-powerful. It is true that, speaking generally, the material world is regulated by law, but behind that law is the Lawgiver and law Administrator. Man is but the creature. God is the Creator, and endless ages before man first saw the light “*the mighty God*” (Isaiah 9:6) existed, and ere the world was founded, made His plans; and being infinite in power and man only finite, His purpose and plan cannot be withstood or thwarted by the creatures of His own hands. We readily acknowledge that life is a profound problem, and that we are surrounded by mystery on every side; but we are not like the beasts of the field—ignorant of their origin, and unconscious of what is before them. No: “*We have also a more sure word of prophecy,*” of which it is said ye do well that ye “*take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts*” (2 Peter 1:19). And it is to this Word of prophecy we indeed do well to “*take heed,*” to that Word which had not its origin in the mind of man but in the mind of God, for, “*the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (verse 21). We say again, it is to this “Word” we do well to take heed. As we turn to this Word and are instructed there out, we discover a fundamental principle that must be applied to every problem: Instead of beginning with man and his world and working back to God, we must begin with God and work down to man—“*In the beginning God...*” (Genesis 1:1)! Apply this principle to the present situation. Begin with the world as it is today and try and work back to God, and everything will seem to show that God has no connection with the world at all. But begin with God and work down to the world, and light, much light, is cast on the problem. Because God is holy His anger burns

against sin; because God is righteous His judgements fall upon those who rebel against Him; because God is faithful the solemn threatening of His Word are fulfilled; because God is omnipotent none can successfully resist Him, still less overthrow His counsel; and because God is omniscient no problem can master Him and no difficulty baffle His wisdom. It is just because God is who He is and what He is that we are now beholding on earth what we do—the beginning of His outpoured judgements: in view of His inflexible justice and immaculate holiness we could not expect anything other than what is now spread before our eyes.

But let it be said very emphatically that the heart can only rest upon and enjoy the blessed truth of the absolute sovereignty of God as faith is in exercise. Faith is ever occupied with God. That is the character of it; that is what differentiates it from intellectual theology. Faith endures “*as seeing him who is invisible*” (Hebrews 11:27); endures the disappointments, the hardships, and the heartaches of life by recognizing that all comes from the hand of Him who is too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. But so long as we are occupied with any other object than God Himself there will be neither rest for the heart nor peace for the mind. But when we receive all that enters our lives as from His hand, then, no matter what may be our circumstances or surroundings—whether in a hovel, a prison dungeon, or a martyr’s stake—we shall be enabled to say, “*The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places*” (Psalm 16:6). But that is the language of faith, not of sight or of sense.

But if instead of bowing to the testimony of Holy Writ, if instead of walking by faith, we follow the evidence of our eyes, and reason therefrom, we shall fall into a quagmire of virtual

atheism. Or, if we are regulated by the opinions and views of others, peace will be at an end. Granted that there is much in this world of sin and suffering that appalls and saddens us; granted that there is much in the providential dealings of God that startle and stagger us; that is no reason why we should unite with the unbelieving worldling who says, "If I were God, I would not allow this or tolerate that," etc. Better far, in the presence of bewildering mystery, to say with one of old, "*I was dumb, I opened not my mouth: because thou didst it*" (Psalm 39:9). Scripture tells us that God's judgements are "unsearchable," and His ways "*past finding out*" (Romans 11:33). It must be so if faith is to be tested, confidence in His wisdom and righteousness strengthened, and submission to His holy will fostered.

Here is the fundamental difference between the man of faith and the man of unbelief. The unbeliever is "of the world," judges everything by worldly standards, views life from the standpoint of time and sense, and weighs everything in the balances of his own carnal making. But the man of faith brings in God, looks at everything from His standpoint, estimates values by spiritual standards, and views life in the light of eternity. Doing this, he receives whatever comes as from the hand of God. Doing this, his heart is calm in the midst of the storm. Doing this, he "[rejoices] *in hope of the glory of God*" (Romans 5:2).

In these opening paragraphs we have indicated the lines of thought followed out in this book. Our first postulate is, that because God is God He does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases; that His great concern is the accomplishment of His own pleasure and the promotion of His own glory; that He is the Supreme Being, and therefore

Sovereign of the universe. Starting with this postulate we have contemplated the exercise of God's sovereignty, first in creation, second in governmental administration over the works of His hands, third in the salvation of His own elect, fourth in the reprobation of the wicked, and fifth in operation upon and within men. Next we have viewed the sovereignty of God as it relates to the human will in particular and human responsibility in general, and have sought to show what is the only becoming attitude for the creature to take in view of the majesty of the Creator. A separate chapter has been set apart for a consideration of some of the difficulties that are involved, and to answering the questions that are likely to be raised in the minds of our readers; while one chapter has been devoted to a more careful yet brief examination of God's sovereignty in relation to prayer. Finally, we have sought to show that the sovereignty of God is a truth revealed to us in Scripture for the comfort of our hearts, the strengthening of our souls, and the blessing of our lives. A due apprehension of God's sovereignty promotes the spirit of worship, provides an incentive to practical godliness, and inspires zeal in service. It is deeply humbling to the human heart, but in proportion to the degree that it brings man into the dust before his Maker, to that extent is God glorified.

We are well aware that what we have written is in open opposition to much of the teaching that is current both in religious literature and in the representative pulpits of the land. We freely grant that the postulate of God's sovereignty with all its corollaries is at direct variance with the opinions and thoughts of the natural man, but the truth is, we are quite unable to think upon these matters: we are incompetent for forming a proper estimate of God's character and ways, and

it is because of this that God has given us a revelation of His mind, and in that revelation He plainly declares, “*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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*” (Isaiah 55:8–9). In view of this Scripture, it is only to be expected that much of the contents of the Bible conflicts with the sentiments of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God. Our appeal then is not to the popular beliefs of the day, nor to the creeds of the churches, but to the law and testimony of Jehovah. All that we ask for is an impartial and attentive examination of what we have written, and that made prayerfully in the light of the lamp of truth. May the reader heed the divine admonition to “*prove all things; hold fast that which is good*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

CHAPTER ONE

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY DEFINED

Thine, O LORD is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.

(1 Chronicles 29:11)

The sovereignty of God is an expression that once was generally understood. It was a phrase commonly used in religious literature. It was a theme frequently expounded in the pulpit. It was a truth that brought comfort to many hearts, and gave virility and stability to Christian character. But, today, to make mention of God's sovereignty is, in many quarters, to speak in an unknown tongue. Were we to announce from the average pulpit that the subject of our discourse would be the sovereignty of God, it would sound very much as though we had borrowed a phrase from one of the dead languages. Alas!

That it should be so. Alas! That the doctrine that is the key to history, the interpreter of providence, the warp and woof of Scripture, and the foundation of Christian theology should be so sadly neglected and so little understood.

The sovereignty of God. What do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the godhood of God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or "*say unto him, What doest thou?*" (Daniel 4:35). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (see Psalm 115:3). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is "*The governor among the nations*" (Psalm 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleases Him best. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the "*only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords*" (1 Timothy 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.

How different is the God of the Bible from the God of modern Christendom! The conception of Deity that prevails most widely today, even among those who profess to give heed to the Scriptures, is a miserable caricature, a blasphemous travesty of the truth. The God of the twentieth century is a helpless, effeminate being who commands the respect of no really thoughtful man. The God of the popular mind is the creation of maudlin sentimentality. The God of many a present-day pulpit is an object of pity rather than of awe-inspiring

reverence.² To say that God the Father has purposed the salvation of all mankind, that God the Son died with the express intention of saving the whole human race, and that God the Holy Spirit is now seeking to win the world to Christ; when, as a matter of common observation, it is apparent that the great majority of our fellowmen are dying in sin, and passing into a hopeless eternity; is to say that God the Father is disappointed, that God the Son is dissatisfied, and that God the Holy Spirit is defeated. We have stated the issue baldly, but there is no escaping the conclusion. To argue that God is "trying His best" to save all mankind, but that the majority of men will not let Him save them, is to insist that the will of the Creator is impotent, and that the will of the creature is omnipotent. To throw the blame, as many do, upon the devil, does not remove the difficulty, for if Satan is defeating the purpose of God, then, Satan is almighty and God is no longer the Supreme Being.

To declare that the Creator's original plan has been frustrated by sin, is to dethrone God. To suggest that God was taken by surprise in Eden and that He is now attempting to remedy an unforeseen calamity, is to degrade the Most High to the level of a finite, erring mortal. To argue that man is a free moral agent and the determiner of his own destiny, and that therefore he has the power to checkmate his Maker, is to strip God of the attribute of omnipotence. To say that the creature has burst the bounds assigned by his Creator, and that God is now practically a helpless Spectator before the

2. Some years ago an evangelical preacher of nation-wide reputation visited the town in which we then were, and during the course of his address kept repeating, "Poor God! Poor God!" Surely it is this "preacher" who needs to be pitied.

sin and suffering entailed by Adam's fall, is to repudiate the express declaration of Holy Writ, namely, "*Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain*" (Psalm 76:10). In a word, to deny the sovereignty of God is to enter upon a path which, if followed to its logical terminus, is to arrive at blank atheism.

The sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, infinite. When we say that God is Sovereign we affirm His right to govern the universe which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. We affirm that His right is the right of the Potter over the clay, i.e., that He may mold that clay into whatsoever form He chooses, fashioning out of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor. (See Romans 9:21.) We affirm that He is under no rule or law outside of His own will and nature, that God is a law unto Himself, and that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any.

Sovereignty characterizes the whole Being of God. He is sovereign in all His attributes. He is sovereign in the exercise of His power. His power is exercised as He wills, when He wills, where He wills. This fact is evidenced on every page of Scripture. For a long season that power appears to be dormant, and then it is put forth in irresistible might. Pharaoh dared to hinder Israel from going forth to worship Jehovah in the wilderness—and what happened? God exercised His power, His people were delivered and their cruel task-masters slain. But a little later, the Amalekites dared to attack these same Israelites in the wilderness, and what happened? Did God put forth His power on this occasion and display His hand as He did at the Red Sea? Were these enemies of His

people promptly overthrown and destroyed? No, on the contrary, the Lord swore that He would “*have war with Amalek from generation to generation*” (Exodus 17:16). Again, when Israel entered the land of Canaan, God’s power was signally displayed. The city of Jericho barred their progress—what happened? Israel did not draw a bow nor strike a blow: the Lord stretched forth His hand and the walls fell down flat. But the miracle was never repeated! No other city fell after this manner. Every other city had to be captured by the sword!

Many other instances might be adduced illustrating the sovereign exercise of God’s power. Take one other example. God put forth His power and David was delivered from Goliath, the giant; the mouths of the lions were closed and Daniel escaped unhurt; the three Hebrew children were cast into the burning fiery furnace and came forth unharmed and unscorched. But God’s power did not always interpose for the deliverance of His people, for we read:

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

(Hebrews 11:36–37)

But why? Why were not these men of faith delivered like the others? Or, why were not the others suffered to be killed like these? Why should God’s power interpose and rescue some and not the others? Why allow Stephen to be stoned to death, and then deliver Peter from prison?

God is sovereign in the delegation of His power to others. Why did God endow Methuselah with a vitality that enabled him to outlive all his contemporaries? Why did God impart to Samson a physical strength that no other human has ever possessed? Again; it is written, "*But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth*" (Deuteronomy 8:18), but God does not bestow this power on all alike. Why not? Why has He given such power to men like Morgan, Carnegie, and Rockefeller? The answer to all of these questions is, because God is sovereign, and being sovereign He does as He pleases.

God is sovereign in the exercise of His mercy. Necessarily so, for mercy is directed by the will of Him that showeth mercy. Mercy is not a right to which man is entitled. Mercy is that adorable attribute of God by which He pities and relieves the wretched. But under the righteous government of God no one is wretched who does not deserve to be so. The objects of mercy, then, are those who are miserable, and all misery is the result of sin, hence the miserable are deserving of punishment not mercy. To speak of deserving mercy is a contradiction of terms.

God bestows His mercies on whom He pleases and withholds them as seemeth good unto Himself. A remarkable illustration of this fact is seen in the manner that God responded to the prayers of two men offered under very similar circumstances. Sentence of death was passed upon Moses for one act of disobedience, and he besought the Lord for a reprieve. But was his desire gratified? No; he told Israel, "*The LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me:*

and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee" (Deuteronomy 3:26). Now mark the second case:

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years.

(2 Kings 20:1–6)

Both of these men had the sentence of death in themselves, and both prayed earnestly unto the Lord for a reprieve: the one wrote: "*The LORD will not hear me*" (Psalm 66:18), and died; but to the other it was said, "*I have heard thy prayer,*" and his life was spared. What an illustration and exemplification of the truth expressed in Romans 9:15, "*For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*"

The sovereign exercise of God's mercy-pity shown to the wretched-was displayed when Jehovah became flesh and tabernacled among men. Take one illustration. During one of the

feasts of the Jews, the Lord Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He came to the Pool of Bethesda where lay “a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water” (John 5:3). Among this “great multitude” there was “a certain man which had an infirmity thirty and eight years” (verse 5). What happened?

When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answer him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but when I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked. (John 5:6–9)

Why was this one man singled out from all the others? We are not told that he cried “Lord, have mercy on me.” There is not a word in the narrative that intimates that this man possessed any qualifications that entitled him to receive special favor. Here then was a case of the sovereign exercise of divine mercy, for it was just as easy for Christ to heal the whole of that “great multitude” as this one “certain man.” But He did not. He put forth His power and relieved the wretchedness of this one particular sufferer, and for some reason known only to Himself, He declined to do the same for the others. Again, we say, what an illustration and exemplification of Romans 9:15, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

God is sovereign in the exercise of His love. Ah! That is a hard saying, who then can receive it? It is written, “A man can

receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (John 3:27). When we say that God is sovereign in the exercise of His love, we mean that He loves whom He chooses. God does not love everybody;³ if He did, He would love the devil. Why does not God love the devil? Because there is nothing in him to love; because there is nothing in him to attract the heart of God. Nor is there anything to attract God's love in any of the fallen sons of Adam, for all of them are, by nature, "*children of wrath*" (Ephesians 2:3). If then there is nothing in any member of the human race to attract God's love, and if, notwithstanding, He does love some, then it necessarily follows that the cause of His love must be found in Himself, which is only another way of saying that the exercise of God's love towards the fallen sons of men is according to His own good pleasure.⁴

In the final analysis, the exercise of God's love must be traced back to His sovereignty or, otherwise, He would love by rule; and if He loved by rule, then is He under a law of love, and if He is under a law of love then is He not supreme, but is Himself ruled by law. "But," it may be asked, "Surely you do not deny that God loves the entire human family?" We reply, it is written, "*Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*" (Romans 9:13). If then God loved Jacob and hated Esau, and that before they were born or had done either good or evil, then the reason for His love was not in them, but in Himself.

3. John 3:16 will be examined later.

4. We are not unmindful of the fact that men have invented the distinction between God's love of complacency and His love of compassion, but this is an invention pure and simple. Scripture terms the latter God's "pity" (see Matthew 18:33), and "*He is kind unto the unthankful and the evil*" (Luke 6:35)!

That the exercise of God's love is according to His own sovereign pleasure is also clear from the language of Ephesians 1:3–5, where we read,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath 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.

It was “in love” that God the Father predestined His chosen ones unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, “*according*”—according to what? According to some excellency He discovered in them? No. What then? According to what He foresaw they would become? No; mark carefully the inspired answer. “*According to the good pleasure of his will.*”

God is sovereign in the exercise of His grace. This of necessity, for grace is favor shown to the undeserving, yea, to the Hell-deserving. Grace is the antithesis of justice. Justice demands the impartial enforcement of law. Justice requires that each shall receive his legitimate due, neither more nor less. Justice bestows no favors and is no respecter of persons. Justice, as such, shows no pity and knows no mercy. But after justice has been fully satisfied, grace flows forth. Divine grace is not exercised at the expense of justice, but “*grace reigns through righteousness*” (Romans 5:21), and if grace “*reigns,*” then is grace sovereign.

Grace has been defined as the unmerited favor of God;⁵ and if unmerited, then none can claim it as their inalienable right. If grace is unearned and undeserved, then none are entitled to it. If grace is a gift, then none can demand it. Therefore, as salvation is by grace, the free gift of God, then He bestows it on whom He pleases. Because salvation is by grace, the very chief of sinners is not beyond the reach of divine mercy. Because salvation is by grace, boasting is excluded and God gets all the glory.

The sovereign exercise of grace is illustrated on nearly every page of Scripture. The Gentiles are left to walk in their own ways while Israel becomes the covenant people of Jehovah. Ishmael the firstborn is cast out comparatively unblessed, while Isaac the son of his parents' old age is made the child of promise. Esau the generous-hearted and forgiving-spirited is denied the blessing, though he sought it carefully with tears, while the worm Jacob receives the inheritance and is fashioned into a vessel of honor. So in the New Testament. Divine truth is hidden from the wise and prudent, but is revealed to babes. The Pharisees and Sadducees are left to go their own way, while publicans and harlots are drawn by the cords of love.

In a remarkable manner divine grace was exercised at the time of the Savior's birth. The incarnation of God's Son was one of the greatest events in the history of the universe, and yet its actual occurrence was not made known to all mankind; instead, it was specially revealed to the Bethlehem shepherds

5. An esteemed friend who kindly read through this book in its manuscript form, and to whom we are indebted for a number of excellent suggestions, has pointed out that grace is something more than "unmerited favor." To feed a tramp who calls on me is "unmerited favor," but it is scarcely grace. But suppose that after robbing me I should feed this starving tramp—that would be "grace." Grace, then, is favor shown where there is positive de-merit in the one receiving it.

and wise men of the East. And this was prophetic and indicative of the entire course of this dispensation, for even today Christ is not made known to all. It would have been an easy matter for God to have sent a company of angels to every nation and to have announced the birth of His Son. But He did not. God could have readily attracted the attention of all mankind to the “star”; but He did not. Why? Because God is sovereign and dispenses His favors as He pleases. Note particularly the two classes to whom the birth of the Savior was made known, namely, the most unlikely classes—illiterate shepherds and heathen from a far country. No angel stood before the Sanhedrin and announced the advent of Israel’s Messiah! No “star” appeared unto the scribes and lawyers as they, in their pride and self-righteousness, searched the Scriptures! They searched diligently to find out where He should be born, and yet it was not made known to them when He was actually come. What a display of divine sovereignty—the illiterate shepherds singled out for peculiar honor, and the learned and eminent passed by! And why was the birth of the Savior revealed to these foreigners, and not to those in whose midst He was born? See in this a wonderful foreshadowing of God’s dealings with our race throughout the entire Christian dispensation—sovereign in the exercise of His grace, bestowing His favors on whom He pleases, often on the most unlikely and unworthy.⁶

6. It has been pointed out to us that God’s sovereignty was signally displayed in His choice of the place where His Son was born. Not to Greece or Italy did the Lord of Glory come, but to the insignificant land of Palestine! Not in Jerusalem—the royal city—was Immanuel born, but in Bethlehem, which was “little among the thousands [of towns and villages] in Judah” (Micah 5:2)! And it was in despised Nazareth that He grew up! Truly, God’s ways are not ours.