

The Sovereignty of God

by J.C. Philpot

The sovereignty of God is a great and unfathomable depth that should be approached with trembling steps and believing, reverent eyes, recognizing its supreme authority and control over all things.

Scripture: Exodus 32:32, Psalm 77:19, Acts 21:13, Romans 9:2, 1 Corinthians 1:30

Topics: "Divine Sovereignty", "Gods Grace"

Description

J.C. Philpot delves into the unfathomable depth of the Sovereignty of God, emphasizing the need for believers to approach it with trembling steps and reverent eyes. He contrasts the rebellious denial of divine sovereignty with the flippant acceptance, highlighting the importance of experiencing it personally through the Holy Spirit. Philpot stresses the awe and reverence due to God's sovereignty in electing some to eternal life, urging believers to submit to His will with holy joy and solemnity. He explores the transformative power of God's grace in the lives of individuals like Saul of Tarsus and the dying thief, showcasing the remarkable examples of sovereign love and redemption.

Transcript

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The Sovereignty of God is a great, an unfathomable depth, and needs ever to be approached by the saints and servants of the Most High with trembling steps, and looked at and into with believing, reverent eyes. "My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments." "My heart stands in awe of your Word." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word." Such is the frame of soul in vital experience, however in our day little known and less regarded, in which it becomes "those who are escaped of Israel" (Isa. 4:2) to look at the sovereign good pleasure of Jehovah in "doing according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth."

Many fight, with all the desperate enmity and rebellion of the carnal mind, against the bare idea that all men and all things are at the sovereign disposal of the great God of heaven and earth; and others, who are not thus held down hard and fast in the chains of rebellion and error, hold the doctrine of divine sovereignty, if not in unrighteousness, at least in a carnal, presumptuous spirit, which plainly shows that they never learned it feelingly and experimentally in their own souls under the teaching and unction of the Holy Spirit. It is hard, perhaps, to say which of the two is the more repulsive to the spiritual mind--the

daring denial of the 'rebellious Arminian', or the flippant boldness of the 'dead Calvinist'. Error is hateful, but truth in a hardened conscience is awful.

The grand and glorious truths which are revealed in the word of God are to be received not as mere speculative doctrines into the natural judgment and reasoning mind--but into the tender heart and living conscience--as the gracious unfolding of the mind and counsel, the will and wisdom of Him who is "greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence by all of those who are about him." And surely of all truths revealed in the Scriptures none is more to be regarded with trembling awe and holy reverence than the sovereignty of Jehovah in electing some to eternal life and appointing others to eternal destruction. We believe this on the authority of Him who cannot lie; but when we look up into heaven, and see its unspeakable bliss and glory, and look down into hell and view its ever-burning flames, we may well pause and say, "Your way is in the sea, and your path in the great waters, and your footsteps are not known." (Psalm 77:19.)

There are those who seem almost to exult in a carnal spirit over the destruction of the reprobate. There is, indeed, a solemn submission to, and a believing acquiescence in the sovereign will of the Judge of all the earth, knowing that he must do right, as Aaron "held his peace" when fire from the Lord went out and devoured his two sons, Nadab and Abihu. (Lev. 10:2, 3.) No, more, there is a holy joy in the conquest of the Lamb over his enemies, as expressed in the words, "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets; for God has avenged you on her" (Rev. 18:20;) and, "So let all your enemies perish, O Lord; but let those who love him be as the sun when he goes forth in his might." (Judges 5:31.) But this is a very different feeling from a carnal exultation over the lost, which shows a state of mind, to say the least of it, the exact opposite of Paul's "great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart" for his unbelieving brethren, (Rom. 9:2,) and breathes a language very unlike the prayer of Moses, "Yet, now, if you will forgive their sin--and if not, blot me, I pray you, out of your book which you have written." (Exodus 32:32.)

Who can think, without grief and sorrow of heart, upon a dear parent, child, or husband--departed without any evidence of a work of grace upon the soul? When you awake at midnight and think of the departed one, where is your exultation over those fixed decrees which determined his eternal state? Submission there may be and should be to the will of God--but a man must be a very heathen--"without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful," (Rom. 1:31,) who has neither sigh nor tear for his own family--at the thought of their eternal woe.

It is when we look at the sovereignty of God on what we may perhaps call its bright side--its merciful and gracious aspect, as plucking innumerable brands out of the fire, and especially when the decree of election turns its smiling face upon us, that we can rejoice in it, and admire and adore the electing love of God in delivering our souls from the bottomless pit. And not only we who have been made alive from the dead, but every regenerate soul is a living witness of the sovereignty of grace. There is not, there never was, there never will be--a manifested vessel of mercy, who is not a monument of the sovereign electing, redeeming, regenerating, and preserving love of a Triune Jehovah; and this every saint of God feels when mercy visits his heart and he is sealed by the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption. "Why me? why me?" must ever be the wondering, admiring, adoring cry of every child of God when blessed with a feeling, appropriating sense of his personal saving interest in the precious blood and love of the Lamb!

But there are instances which seem to shine forth with peculiar luster, and to stand out beyond the usual dealings of God as prominent examples of the sovereignty of his eternal love. As in a garden every flower

may be beautiful in its kind--and all were planted by the same gardener's hand to deck and adorn his beds--but there may be some which strike the eye as more outstanding in beauty of shape and brightness of color than the other occupants of the garden--so in the church of God there are trees of his right hand planting which display more conspicuously than others--the wonders of his sovereign, distinguishing grace.

Saul of Tarsus and the thief on the cross have always struck our own mind as two of the most striking instances of sovereign grace contained in the Scriptures. Paul--the self-righteous Pharisee, imbued with all the learning and pride of the Sanhedrin, and overflowing with all the persecuting spirit of the murderers of Stephen; and the dying thief--loaded with the crimes of a life of violence and bloodshed, yet snatched from the jaws of hell at the last gasp! Reader, and admirer of the grace of God, can you strike the balance between these two monuments of electing love, and decide which was the more indebted to sovereign grace?

"Ah," but say you, "I know a greater monument of sovereign grace than either." Well, be it so; but next to yourself, can you decide whether Paul or the dying thief was the more indebted to the heights and depths, lengths and breadths of atoning blood and redeeming love? We really, for our part, cannot tell. We look at PAUL before and after his conversion, and wonder at and admire the grace of God that made out of such a pharisee, such a bigot, such a strict consistent legalist, such a bloodthirsty persecutor--a saint so rich in every grace, an apostle so endowed with every fruit and gift of the Holy Spirit. Saul on his road to Damascus, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," and Paul, with the words in his heart and mouth, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus;" (Acts 21:13;)--O what grace thus to change the lion into the lamb, the man ready to martyr--into the man ready to be martyred!

But next we turn to the DYING THIEF. Listen with wondering ears and admiring heart to his believing prayer, addressed under such circumstances and at such a moment to the Son of God, in his deepest humiliation, at his lowest point of ignominy and shame, when his very disciples all forsook him and fled, and his glory was hidden under the densest, darkest veil. A risen Jesus appeared to Paul in all the blaze of heavenly glory; a crucified Jesus was hanging before the dying thief in little less shame and degradation than himself and his twin malefactor. O, what faith at such a moment to call him, "Lord," and to believe he had a kingdom, and to desire to be made a partaker of its present grace and future glory! Has not this prayer, believing reader, been mine and yours? Have not we sought to realize the blessed Redeemer as set thus before our eyes? and while we threw all our heart and soul into the petition, breathed forth, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom?" The prayer of the dying thief shines, we must say, in our eyes as one of the greatest, if not the greatest act of faith recorded in the Scriptures, and only paralleled, we cannot say surpassed, by Abraham's sacrifice of his son.

But let us not think that there are not now walking on the face of the earth similar monuments of sovereign grace. Up that court, in that garret, there is a dying Mary Magdalene, out of whom the Lord has cast seven devils. Down in that coal-mine there is one whom once "no man could bind, no, not with chains," "neither could any man tame him;" but he is now "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." Walking under that hedge, now weeping, now praying, now singing, now looking into his little Bible, is a returned prodigal--a base backslider whom the Lord has forgiven, but who can never forgive himself. Hiding his face in the corner of the pew is that persecutor of his poor broken-hearted wife, now in glory, whom since her death the Lord has called by his grace, and whose tears and sighs show how deeply he repents of his sins against her and Him. While the world is going on buying and selling, eating and drinking, marrying

and giving in marriage, God is here and there raising up these monuments of his grace to live forever and ever in his presence, when the world and all the fashion of it shall have utterly passed away.

To a spiritual mind, what sweet food for faith, what a field of holy meditation is opened up in the sovereignty of grace as thus displayed in those wonders of redeeming love which every now and then come under our own special knowledge and observation! To what praise and adoration does it give birth; what openings up of the depths of the Father's love; what views of the fullness and perfection of the Redeemer's blood and obedience; what a sight of salvation as a free, irrevocable gift; how independent of all creature works of righteousness, how distinguishing, how superabounding over all the abounding of sin and guilt, is grace seen to be; what love and union are felt to the objects of this signal mercy; how the soul is more and more firmly established thereby in the truth of God; and that "it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God who shows mercy!"

Dare any call the sovereignty of God in his electing love and discriminating grace "a licentious doctrine?" Ignorance coined that lie; and enmity gave it circulation. The sovereignty of grace received into a believing heart has led many a one from sin; it never, under the unction of the Holy Spirit, led one into sin. Many a poor, despairing wretch it has saved, not only from the guilt of sin that distressed his conscience, but from the power of sin that entangled his inclinations, and carried him captive. The same Christ Jesus who is made to his people "righteousness and redemption," is also made unto them "wisdom and sanctification;" (1 Cor. 1:30;) and those who are "washed and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus," are also "sanctified by the Spirit of God." (1 Cor. 6:11.)

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