

The Sovereignty Of God (Part One)

Introduction

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I have been spending a great deal of time lately on subjects that pertain to our obligations to God and to fellow man, so I thought that I would switch to a series on a subject that I hope will greatly expand our appreciation of God—the God that we are attempting to serve.

I first came into formal contact with this subject back during the '60s when I read a small book entitled, *Your God is Too Small*. It was by J.B. Phillips who was the author of the Phillips translation of the Bible, and since that time I have read other commentaries that were devoted to this same subject, including A. W. Tozer's *The Attributes of God*. Also I read Arthur Pink's book on *The Sovereignty of God*, which is considered by some to be hyper-Calvinism. I do not know whether you understand what that means, but it means that they feel that Pink is saying that everything is predestinated and that this makes free moral agency a quality of little or no value.

But out of these studies have come the sermon that I consider personally to be my signature sermon, and that is, "Do You See God?" But this series of sermons is going to be much more detailed than "Do You See God?" especially as it relates to how deeply involved God is in the operation of His creation. In this particular sermon, I am going to do little more than lay the foundation for the details that are going to follow in other sermons. Much in this sermon will involve one particular responsibility of ours to God, and a very important responsibility it is.

The sovereignty of God is a subject that is very easily accepted when all that matters is intellectual agreement with it. But there are going to be times—there have already been times—in your life when the sovereignty of God is going to be **very** difficult to accept, and even unfathomable in its practical reality in your life, especially when that reality may strike close to home in a very difficult and perhaps even tragic way.

What about God? Does He have no rights or claims on what He created? It is very easy for us to make too much of man, and too little of God, especially when He is always out of sight. So I think that it is time to restore some balance to my teaching by revealing some more about the Father and what He does from His sovereign position as Creator.

Let us begin with a seemingly simple question. *Who is regulating affairs on earth?* Is it God? Is it the Devil? Or is it man? If we do not watch ourselves, in our minds we will almost automatically assign *God* as being supreme in the **heavens**, but *Satan* rules the earth. This is very easy to do because does not the Bible say that the earth is the first estate of the fallen angels and that Satan is the ruler of this world? Out in the world, from which we have all come, because evolution is such a popular religion, not only is it denied that God created everything by His personal and direct action, but very few will give Him any immediate concern in regulating what is going on.

Almost everything, they will say, is regulated as working according to the abstract laws of nature. "Oh, it just happened!" "It just happened that way because that is the way the laws are." Is that a correct assumption?

When it comes to personal responsibility, we almost invariably think of our own free moral agency, and so we will also almost just as frequently blame Satan for what, in fact, proceeded from our own evil heart, as though we do not have any responsibility at all. We may not say it, but it is part of this "the Devil made me do it" routine. There is a very powerful tendency at work in human nature to put oneself as being the victim of external circumstances. So we rationalize that we were not really to blame.

As we begin, I want to turn to a couple of scriptures that clearly show this is a justification that God will accept, but only so far. We do have to see this sovereignty issue from this perspective of our responsibility, because the Bible clearly shows that we are being forced to choose between those that we consider to be the sovereign ruler. Now, who is it going to be?

Mark 7:21-23 For from within, out of the heart of men [Notice where He places the blame here. Notice where He places the responsibility], proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil

eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile the man.

Mark 7:9 He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition."

That is pretty clear in that context. Jesus places the blame right upon man. Let us go back to Matthew the 13th chapter, right at the beginning of a long series of parables regarding the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 13:14-15 "And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand, and seeing you will see [I want you to see the words here very clearly.] and not perceive [Now, in verse 15 He is going to tell us why.]; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts turn, so that I should heal them.'

Again, it is pretty obvious that He lays the choices—the decisions, the judgments to do these things—not on Satan's shoulders, but on *man's*—that man should know enough to resist any impulse of Satan to do these things. So, who is it that God holds responsible for these things—for obeying Him? It is true—we learn from Revelation 12:9—that the Devil has deceived the whole world, but when we add these other factors, we find that God holds each responsible for what each has done. He holds Satan responsible for his part, and He holds each person responsible for his part; otherwise (it has to be this way) of what consequence is free moral agency? It is of no consequence at all. So God, from His position, does not view us as being free from blame because we have been duped by Satan.

We can look back to a very simple example of God's judgment concerning Adam and Eve. He has shown a portion of blame to each exactly where it belongs—on all three participants. This is especially important for us to understand because the Bible is written for those who have made the covenant with God. It is not written directly for the world. It is only written indirectly for them.

It is given to those who have had their eyes open—to those to whom God has revealed Himself, and therefore God has put us into a position that is very similar to what Adam and Eve were in. God revealed Himself to Adam and Eve from the very beginning, and they were in a position where they **knew** God and they were in a position to make a choice that maybe others were not quite in the same position—I mean others who followed them, because they did not have that initial contact with God. But now we have been put in a position where God has revealed Himself to us, and because He has done that we are in much the same position as Adam and Eve.

These verses that I have read to you apply to us more directly than it does to anybody in the world by far. So we have to squarely face our responsibility concerning who it is that we are going to choose to serve. Is it going to be the Sovereign Lord Creator, or Satan, a fallen angel? Who is the sovereign in your life?

As we continue, let us read II Timothy 3:1. I just want to read this first verse so that we remember the context in which this appears.

II Timothy 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

That puts what follows, into our time.

II Timothy 3:13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

We might add to this I John 2:15-17 where he basically says to love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. So we will consider those two verses together. There is sufficient pressure coming from the world, so that if we are lackadaisical in carrying out our responsibilities, we can easily allow ourselves to follow Satan's arrangement of things, as shown in the world. There is much out there that is attractive to human nature and to true Christians, and we can see, despite two thousand years of preaching by the church, there is much that we can still find in that the overwhelming majority is still following the broad way, is it not?

The world scene out there makes it look as though Christianity is an abject failure—it is like an altruistic experience that has gone awry. The world gives every impression that God has either gone far off somewhere, and perhaps His whole creation is nothing more than a cosmic joke—those words have even been used—in which God never really did care, but the creation is merely a plaything of His with no positive, beneficial-to-us purpose in mind. So, with that kind of approach, if we are lackadaisical, the world can be very persuasive.

It is not very difficult at all when viewing the expanse of Christian history for a carnal person to reach the conclusion that God is somebody who has good intentions, but is very frequently disappointed because Satan outwits Him, or man thwarts Him, and thus God is frustrated in everything that He tries to do.

It is like He says that He wants to bless men, but they will not let Him. Now, who can take God seriously with that perspective? It makes it very easy to think, or to live, as though God really was not sovereign in His creation.

These I feel are questions and they are thoughts that we must take seriously, and yet I think that if I ask them directly to you as I am doing now, that you are going to say that you do not think that way. You think that God is in complete and total control, ruling His creation, and I sincerely hope that that is true. But I have found, even from my own life, that though we may say that, we sometimes live and talk as though we *do* think the way the world does. I can tell you, though, who will not think nor live that way. It is those who really *are* living by faith.

What does it mean, "to walk by faith"? It means that we are allowing our thoughts to be formed, and therefore our conduct molded by God's Word, because faith comes by hearing. It means faith comes by means of hearing, and hearing by means of the word of God.

I recently read in a commentary that the most frequently repeated command, or charge, or exhortation of Jesus Christ, during His ministry, can be reduced to one word—*Listen!* Do you know how many times that appears just during Christ's ministry to the first century church? Eighteen times! Now, what did He mean? He meant, "Listen to the message!"—because as you are going to

see, when you begin to think about this, this is the *very* thing that mankind has not done.

Faith comes by hearing. That means faith comes by means of listening to the word of God. Now, how much faith is being displayed on earth today? Not very much! There is so little, that Jesus prophesied by asking the question, "When the Son of man comes, will He find any faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). I can guarantee you that He will not find very much because not very many people think God is the Sovereign Ruler of His creation. It is that simple! They may *think* they believe it, but their lives do not show it. If their lives showed it, then they would show that they really were listening to the word of God.

I want you to look at something that is in a way kind of shocking to the end-time church, of which we are a part, in the book of Revelation—in Revelation 2 and 3. You know that in Revelation 2 and 3 are the letters to the seven churches. If you have a red-letter Bible, this is in red letters. Jesus Christ is the speaker:

Revelation 2:7 He that has an ear, let him hear.

That is just an alternative way of saying, "listen!"

To the end-time church, His number one charge is, "Listen!" Is He afraid that His people at the end are not listening? Yes He is! The reason is because there are *so many* distractions, and because Satan has arranged things in his world that are so attractive to human nature—so appealing, so distracting to really listening to the word of God. And we get side-tracked and we do not really live it even though we give lip service to it.

Revelation 2:11 He that has an ear, let him hear.

Listen again!

Revelation 2:17 He that has an ear, let him hear.

Revelation 2:29 He that has an ear, let him hear.

And it goes of course right on through chapter 3, and the other churches listed there.

Let me give you an example from the Old Testament of just how important this is:

Jeremiah 25:3-4 From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that is the three and twentieth year, the word of the LORD has come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but you have not listened.

Jeremiah was God's prophet at this time. Judah was just about ready to go into captivity. Jeremiah was God's, you might say, major, last prophet—the **last** one that He sent to appeal to those people before their society, their civilization, came to an end. What was Jeremiah's complaint? "For 23 years I've been speaking to you and you're not listening." And because they did not listen, by the time we read this in Jeremiah 25, the nation had already been defeated and this group of people was on the run, trying to save their lives. So Jeremiah was just making it very plain. "You didn't listen."

Jeremiah 25:5 They said, Turn you again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD has given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever.

Jeremiah 25:7-9 Yet you have not listened [hearkened] unto me, says the LORD; that you might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts; Because you have not heard my words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north. . .

This is typical of why Jesus admonished us to listen. They heard, but they did not listen. The direct result was the pain of warfare and all the disruptions in society before the war actually broke out—the kinds of things that our society, our culture, is struggling with this very day—things similar to the drug scene, things similar to all the murders taking place all over the

land, all kinds of sickness and so forth. God said if they would only repent, He would heal them. They did not listen. They did not repent. They did not get healed. Instead, they went into war and captivity, and so here they are, fleeing for their lives.

God is saying in this kind of situation what almost any parent would say to a child in a similar situation. The parent would say, "I told you not to do that, but you wouldn't **listen**." How many times have you said that to your children? Now, *why* did Judah not listen? I will tell you why, and again, the answer is not difficult, because to them (those who were hearing the Word) the word spoken by God's prophets carried **no** authority with them. God even said that they dismissed it as a little thing, of having no consequence. The words carried no authority because the people had no faith in God's sovereignty.

I think that I can guarantee you, because these people had made the covenant with God and because they had been taught by one of God's prophets, that if you had asked them the question of whether they believed in God, that they would have told you, "Yes, I believe in God." But the practical reality was that they had no *faith* in God—that God was even anywhere around. They did not have faith that He had the power to do what He said, or that He cared enough about them to do it. So they did not have **living** faith.

Why is it so important to listen to God's message? Because it is through those who listen and believe the message that God's summons comes, and God's work is done. You hear men saying that they are doing the work of God. Well, God gives simple definitions of what His work is. We turn to the word of God and God tells us what His work is. In one place, I believe it is Psalm 75, He said, "God is working salvation in all the earth." This one here in John 6:29 is so clear. He says:

John 6:29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God [Here it is, so simply stated.] that you believe on Him whom He has sent.

The Word of God—the Bible—is the word of the Son, as well as the word of the Father. This is a chapter from which we take a significant portion of the

Passover service from, because Jesus went on to say that He was the bread of life and that we have to eat of His flesh and drink His blood, and of course there are symbolic and very important spiritual ramifications to what He said.

John 6:63-64 It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not.

They did not believe what Jesus said. These were disciples. Now they might have believed for a while anyway that Jesus was Messiah, but they were not believing what He said, especially when He said those hard to accept things that He was the bread that came down from heaven and that people had to eat of His flesh and drink His blood—that was something that they turned their ears deaf against. They heard them, but they were not really listening, and it says that Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who believed not and who should betray Him, and so, in verse 66:

John 6:66-69 From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will you also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

They were listening to a far greater extent than those who went away were, and they were willing to walk with Him. They believed what He said. The reason this is important to you and me is not only the direct application to the subject there in chapter 6, but in the course of this sermon, that it is only from God's Word that we can come to know who is regulating affairs on the earth and the truth about what to believe. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." And what tips the scale (if I can put it that way) to balance in the right direction is whether we hear, listen, understand, and translate it into practical application, because the word has authority in our hearts and minds enough to make us do it.

This thing of authority, in terms of the Bible, is very important. Just to give you an illustration—why do you think that certain pharmaceutical companies put in their ads that such and such a percentage of doctors prescribe such and

such a medication? You see, they are trading on the authority of the medical profession to add emphasis to what they are saying about their product. Why do manufacturers of athletic equipment want the endorsement of a certain athletic superstar? Because that lends authority to what they are saying about their product.

Where do you think the word "mister" came from? It comes from the word "master," which shows that this individual has more authority than that other individual who is not a master. We put titles on people in order to give them the authority of that particular word. A "supervisor"—so that when the supervisor says something, his word has more authority than if some other ordinary person says the same thing. That is the principle that is at work here.

Now, if we really see God as the sovereign ruler of everything in creation, and that He is involved deeply in our lives, then it is very likely that when He says something (like E. F. Hutton) we are going to listen. Because when E. F. Hutton said something, everybody else goes quiet and listens to what E. F. Hutton says. That is the principle. This sovereignty issue is very important to our faith.

In the book of Jude, all of the major issues of life revolve around whether we believe what God says. Let us put this into what is going on in the greater church of God today. What is the single biggest issue today in the wake of the breakup of the WCG? It is government.

Look at Jude 8, and while you are looking at it, and I read it, I want you to think about the time element in which this was written. There is a pretty good reason why the book of Jude sits in the position it does—right after the writings of James, Peter, John, and leading directly into the book of Revelation (the end-time book) because, from what I have been able to see in introductions to different books, Jude was one of the later books written, and what it is reporting on was what was taking place as we approached the end of the first century, and you will find sections of it that are so similar to II Peter, you would almost think that the same man wrote it. Well, the same God inspired it, although it is my understanding that the book of Jude was written maybe 15 or 20 years after the book of II Peter; but the same things were still happening in the church that Peter wrote about, only they had advanced to a greater intensity. So Jude says:

Jude 8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

So here in the wake of the breakup of the first century church, due to its infiltration, primarily from Gnostics, we find that these people who were invading the church and breaking it up, despised dominion. The description in the advice that the book of Jude gives applies just as surely today as it did then. Now what advice did Jude give? He tells us in verse 3 to get back—to strive for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Now, if you want to undermine that, what ploy do you take? I will tell you what ploy took place, because it is written in the book! The ploy you take is to destroy the reputation of the *messenger* so that you undermine the authority of what it is that he said.

In this age, who was it who was used to deliver the faith to the saints? And what you hear today is some speak as though Mr. Herbert Armstrong never did a right thing in his life, despite the fact that directly, or indirectly, virtually all of us owe our relationship to God to the work that God did through him. People criticize him as if they were standing on some pinnacle of sinless perfection of their own, and self-righteously pointing the finger of scorn at him.

Now who do you think the dignitaries that these filthy dreamers in the book of Jude were speaking evil of? I John 1:1 will tell you it was the first century apostles. "*We have seen Him. We handled Him with our hands—the word of life.*" So, if you want to undermine the authority of the message, you shoot down the messenger's reputation. And so today they speak evil of the apostle God used to raise up His end-time church. It does not stop there. They say, "I'll *never* follow another man," as though following another man is somehow inherently evil. These people are either speaking from ignorance of God's Word, or by design to destroy in order to get a following for themselves, and in the course of this, they are forgetting God's sovereignty over His creation. Think about this. Do you know of any time in God's Word when there was not a **man** in the mix between God and men, except for Adam and Eve?

God has always used men as His messengers, including Moses, Isaiah, Amos, John, Paul, Jude—you name it. All of those fellows were used by God, and so were many priests, ministers, pastors under those men. Each one of those men, though they may have held a very high position in being close to God, and at times been directly inspired by Him, still, nonetheless, built upon what was passed onto them by the men who went before them. Thus they themselves were followers of those men that God had raised up preceding them. So they were following men.

These people will also say, "Well, I'm just as good as he is [meaning the minister]. My intelligence is better than his. I can read and use the same resources he does. I can learn apart from him. Ordinations don't mean a thing. I've been in the church longer than he has. My marriage is better than his."Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, AD infinitum. But brethren, understand this. These rationalizations are **not** the issue. The issue is *the sovereignty of God*. Has God placed that person in a position to shepherd a flock? That is the issue. A shepherd leads. A flock follows.

There is much happening in the world and in the church, which we might carelessly assume must have happened when God was looking the other way, or maybe He just did not care. It is easy to write off events in that manner, but is it a true conclusion according to the Bible?

Ephesians 1:11 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.

God works **all** things after the counsel of His will. This thought there in verse 11 is reflecting back on something that appears in the book of Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 32:9-10 For the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.

Now I am going to add another verse to that.

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, has the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Now let us consider these verses. First of all, consider Israel's roots from those verses that we have just read, their geographic location and their history. They were a slave people. They lived in a land that was not theirs, and yet they were freed from that slavery *without* a revolutionary war. They were then taken on a journey that took 40 years to complete, in an area in which, from all the records, it does not show them growing a crop or tending huge flocks of animals—yet all their needs were supplied while they were out there, at least all the basic needs that they had for life—the manna, the water.

Whenever they were attacked, they were defended. But when that 40 years was over, they were then taken into another land that was not theirs. It was already occupied by another nation—actually seven of them who were greater, mightier, and stronger than they were, so much so that even the Israelites said that "We were as grasshoppers in their eyes," and were afraid to go in. But they were taken into that land, and just like 40 years before, the land was given to them relatively easily. They should have been easily defeated by the people whose land they took over.

Now, consider the geography of that land. The land was situated between stronger and larger nations, namely: Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, the Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Syrians. They were surrounded on all sides and all of those nations coveted that land that they were living in because of its strategic position. It was in a position to make oodles and oodles of money, as a bridge between all of these other nations—a trading bridge from which they could become wealthy. The land was constantly fought over. But somehow or another, they survived. Even today, thousands of years later, they continue to exist, even though the world thinks that they have virtually disappeared.

Now think of these things, because what Paul is saying in Ephesians 1:11, in the context, that the history of Israel is no accident. Begin to make this more personal, because he is using that example to show that it is no accident that the church has succeeded Israel as God's inheritance.

What is implied in the context, without being directly stated (because it is shown in other scriptures), is that it is no accident that *you*, personally and individually, are in the church, because God has been working toward these events from the beginning. What God wills is done. So what Paul is saying, without saying it directly, is that God is sovereign over His creation.

Now I want you to stretch (for a little while) that "all things" in Ephesians 1:11 into other areas of life. That "all things" makes this subject very interesting in the light of Jesus' statement that a sparrow cannot fall without God taking notice. That is pretty close attention. Is God scrutinizing what is going on? Jesus concluded that by saying, "You're worth more than many sparrows." That is really encouraging. But the idea is to help us to understand that if God pays attention to a sparrow, He surely is going to pay attention to **you!** Has He really gone far off somewhere?

Perhaps a case could be made for saying that some things occur out in the world that are of no significant import to God's purpose. But what about His church? What about the "apple of His eye"—the focus of His attention? Well, those questions fit the context of what Paul is writing about here in Ephesians 1. Is God unaware? Is He unconcerned about His children so that things happen without His notice, without His scrutiny, without His judgment as to what He should do? Is God really the Almighty?

Now consider this: either God rules, or, He is swayed and ruled over by Satan. Either His will must be done, or be thwarted by what He has created. Either He is the only King of kings who has perfect vision and limitless power, or He is only God in name. It cannot be any other way. There is no middle ground in this issue.

Perhaps you take this subject for granted because you say to yourself that you have no argument that God rules His creation. I recently went through a series on motivation during which I stated several times that faith undergirded each one of those factors. But brethren, living faith is itself

undergirded—supported, strengthened—by a very important factor that enables us to produce good works.

Remember that verb, "to know"? Eternal life is to know God? We have mentioned it a few times in the past. In Hebrew it is *yada*. In Greek it is *ginosko*, and in English, to know. Let me show you something back in the book of Daniel. As soon as you see this, you are going to say, "Yeah! That fits!" Everybody knows that Daniel 11 is the tail end of the longest prophecy in all of the Bible. Here we are, approaching the end. It is the principle that I am concerned about.

Daniel 11:32 And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.

Now this word "to know"—*yada*, *ginosko*, indicates a combination of close, warm, and even passionate intimacy, combined with head knowledge that produces an edge in a person's life that enables him to trust God, and at the same time perceive what God is doing. Now, if I can put it this way, it is this factor that makes God's Word have authority with us. We *know* Him. It is not just a casual acquaintance. It is this that forms the very foundation of a true working relationship.

Now brethren, ask yourself these questions as I give them. Do we really believe that God is holy, and because of that His anger burns against sin; that because He is righteous His judgments fall on those who rebel; that because God is faithful, His promises of either blessings or cursing are absolute; that because God is omnipotent, nobody can resist Him; but because God is omniscient, there is no problem that He is unaware of or cannot master? It is because God is what He is that we are seeing the prophecies He inspired regarding the end of the age being fulfilled in the world and in the church, and that translates, brethren, into tumultuous, difficult and sometimes scary and even confusing times for us.

Hebrews 11:27 By faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

Why was Moses able to do what he did? He *knew* God. And because he knew God, he was strong, and he did great exploits.

Now these things that I am talking about within the context of this sermon—the prophecies and so forth—can only be seen, understood, and endured so that we will continue to grow through the eyes of faith. Faith, brethren, is always occupied with God, and that is why this series is so important to our lives. Faith will enable you to be strong and do exploits and endure the disappointments in the mysteries of life because you know, that because you are you, and God is who He is, that He is involved, and He is the Master of every situation.

And because you know His character, that He is too wise to make mistakes, that He is too loving and concerned about the outcome of your life, to allow you to be totally overwhelmed. And you know and you believe that Romans 8:28 is still in the Book. Because He rules His creation—He is there—therefore you can live through these times and continue growing with a peace that passes all understanding.

Because salvation is by grace through faith, I see my responsibility from God, as a pastor, to feed you with knowledge that will build faith and at the same time provide motivation for applying what God says in our everyday life in practical ways.

It is right here that I see a major problem—maybe *the* major problem—between God and man very simply stated in Isaiah 55:7-9. These are verses that should be in our memory banks.

Isaiah 55:7-9 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 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.

Because of what He has stated here—this factor, that our thoughts are not His thoughts, and His ways are not our ways—we are not in His image. We cannot say, as Jesus did, that "If you see Me, you have seen the Father." God, in His wisdom, has willed that we become in His image through the exercise of faith—that is, trusting Him, trusting what He says, buttressed by what He reveals of Himself in His creation.

The fundamental difference between the person of faith and the unbeliever is revealed by the difference between the way they judge things. The unbeliever is of the world, and so he judges things by worldly standards, by his senses and by his time. Worldly people are usually very impatient. They will not deny themselves for very long. They want immediate gratification. So things are judged by senses and by time.

The person of faith, on the other hand, brings God into everything, and so he views things from God's perspective—that is, by God's values and how this activity, whatever it might be—this event, this thing, or whatever, looks in terms of eternity, not time, but eternity.

Doing this at times really puts the screws on a person's trust because even the Bible says that God's judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out. In other words, there are going to be times that when our trust in God is going to be stretched to the limit, but because we do not think like He does, because we are not in the position to view from His perspective entirely, we will not exactly know what is going on. But if we realize that He really is the Sovereign Ruler of this universe, we will know that even though there is an awful lot that is scary going on, that is inconclusive in terms of the facts that we have at hand, *we will patiently trust Him.*

Do you remember when you were in elementary school? What was your attitude toward the information that the teacher was giving you? Well, I can tell you what it was. You accepted what the teacher said without question. When the teacher said that 2 plus 2 was 4, you viewed what she said as an absolute. In this case it indeed was an absolute, or remains an absolute. But our attitude toward the information the teacher gave, regardless of the subject, was the same, whether in history, geography, social studies, whatever. We soaked up the information that was given to us like a sponge.

But all the while time passed, we were also receiving information, often conflicting, from other sources, and as we aged, as we matured, we did not exactly know what to do with it. But by the time we hit our teen years, we began to seriously question the information the teachers gave us, and we no longer trusted in the same childlike way that we had before, and this is because by the time that number of years had passed we had accumulated enough information from other sources and were becoming more and more unsure about what is right. So we began more frequently making up our own minds based on our own accumulation of knowledge and experience, and very often it brought us into conflict with others who were doing exactly the same thing.

By the time we got into college, it was even more difficult because most colleges operate on a system that encourages challenging the teacher, present knowledge, and the system. By the time God calls us, "doing it my way" of thinking is so thoroughly ingrained that only the Almighty Creator is able to get rid of it so that we will return to some of the rudimentary elements of faith that we had by nature as a child. "Unless you become as a little child," Jesus said, "you won't be in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Somehow, brethren, we have got to get back to the place where we look at God and His knowledge according to the same principle that we formerly gave teachers in elementary school, and this series of sermons is designed to help us do this by showing us how deeply, how minutely, God is involved in the affairs of Planet Earth—not just in the big things involving a nation's destiny, or a whole group of nations, or even the church's. Rather, His involvement reaches right down into the nitty-gritty of our individual everyday life. I want us to see that our lives, by no stretch of the imagination, can be called mundane, ordinary, because if something has happened to us that sets us apart from everybody else.

Philippians 3:14-15 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: [Let **all** of us press forward.] and if in any thing you be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

In Hebrews 3:1, the author there wrote something that was connected, somewhat similar. He says:

Hebrews 3:1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.

There is no higher, greater responsibility ever given to anybody, at any time, than what we have received. Nothing *greater* can be given to a person than what we have been given. It is our responsibility to take what has been given and run with it. But we are to run with it along the course God shows in His Word and we are to live by faith as we do it. This is *not* easy. Jesus said that the way is difficult. We can see right from this book of Hebrews that from the beginning of the Bible to the end, those who have gone before us had many, many trials. Paul said to Timothy, "through much tribulation shall we all enter the Kingdom of God."

The only way to successfully negotiate it is to do as God instructs, and to do this we absolutely need to know that He is with us the entire way and that His Word carries the greatest authority in the universe, because we are going to have to choose to use our faith to use it. That is what the book of Hebrews is about.

Now, let us conclude this sermon by going back to the book of Isaiah once again.

Isaiah 46:9-10 Remember the former things of old: [Let us look back into God's Word and what He has already recorded about the things that He has done.] for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning. . .

Do you not have to be all powerful, almighty, all living all the time, aware—to say "the end from the beginning," and bring it to pass *exactly* as you say despite the array of enemies that there are aligned against you?

Isaiah 46:10 . . . and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

Isaiah 46:12-13 Hearken unto me, [Listen!] you stouthearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness: it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.

Now this is my aim in this series—to give us biblical evidence that God is indeed sovereign over His creation, and as long as we do not rebel, He is going to bring our lives to a successful conclusion in His Kingdom. Now we believe what these words here in Isaiah 46 say. Some of us may even be able to quote them from memory. But now it is time that we translate into action what they imply. So this series is going to be concerned with the sovereignty of God.