

The Sovereignty of God (Part 6)

Over Mankind

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Given 20-Apr-96; Tape #234

We're going to begin this sermon today, which is again going to be on the Sovereignty of God with an emphasis this time on His sovereignty over mankind in general. Toward the end of the sermon we're going to get specific about one area that touches on us very personally. We're going to begin in Deuteronomy chapter 30, verses 15 through 20. I used this series of verses in my second sermon on "Vanity" on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, but I am beginning here because I want to impress on us all the importance of this sovereignty issue in our lives. It was over this issue that Adam and Eve stumbled, and it is over this issue that mankind continues to stumble, and I know that we continue to stumble as well.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil: In that I command you this day to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply: and the LORD your God shall bless you in the land whither you go to possess it. But if your heart turn away, so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them: I denounce unto you this day, that you shall surely perish, and that you shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither you pass over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live: That you may love the LORD your God, and that you may obey his voice, and that you may cleave unto him: for he is your life, and the length of your days: that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

Always remember this principle when studying God's word—in the book of Genesis (the book of beginnings), God lays down the fundamental elements of His purpose—those things that are going to be high-priority issues virtually all of our life. Now right from the very top He establishes that He is the Creator, that life and its purpose and all of its potential has its beginning in Him and it flows from Him. Thus we are without excuse in knowing that the Creator is the central figure in all of life—not Satan, not ourselves, not other human beings, not anything; because our relationship with Him is central to His purpose in creating us.

That's the first thing that we are hit with when we open up the book to read it. The Creator is established as being the source of every good thing in life. Before we even get out of chapter 1, He has already stated, in general terms, that His purpose is creating man in His image. So even

before we get out of the first chapter, we see that the two most important things (necessities for life) are that the Creator is the central figure in all of life, and He has a specific purpose in mind.

In chapter 2 He establishes the institution of marriage and family as fundamental to learning how to and becoming one, humanly, in order that the family be the primary area for preparation for becoming one with Him. Please get that.

In chapter 3 He reveals the sovereignty issue. Each person, during the processes of life, must decide who is going to be the one obeyed. This will determine character, quality of life, and therefore in whose image we will be in—who is going to be sovereign.

Of course all of these things are not in chapters 1, 2 and 3, and I hope that you understand that I am adding things from other portions of the book. But nonetheless, before you get to verse 5 in chapter 3, four major fundamental foundational elements of the way of God are already established.

Now Satan is also introduced right in the third chapter, and he subtly persuaded them (Adam and Eve) that they would be as gods. Included within this is the implication they would have the right to establish their own standards and to be free to pick and choose. However, he also subtly hid from them that he would be influencing them in establishing those standards and making the choices in order that he—the god of this world—would be sovereign and obeyed, and thus we would be in his image. There are five major things before we are past five verses in the third chapter. This has great bearing on Deuteronomy 30. Before we get back to Deuteronomy 30 in thought, I want us to turn to the book of Ephesians, because Satan has been eminently successful in his ploy.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you has he quickened, [you and me] who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all [everyone of us] had our conduct [conversation] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

It is Satan that we have imitated, and by the time that God calls us we are thoroughly in his (Satan's) image, and these verses prove it. The word of God proves it. We all walked according to the course of this world—according to the spirit that now works according to the prince of the power of the air. We are by nature, or were by nature, the children of wrath.

He also subtly hid from them that this being free to establish one's own standard, and free to pick and choose, would create tremendous diversity. The fruit of that would be a constantly nagging and wearying and confusion—division—and then when vanity is added to the mix: divorce in the family, social problems, including murder in the community, and nationally (bloody warfare). Mankind has paid an awesome price for this privilege that we are not

equipped to handle.

Now God, out of His nature of love and wisdom, had already determined what is right and beautiful—and our free moral agency, if we are going to achieve His purpose and be in His image, is limited to choosing whether or not we will submit to the standards He has already determined. Now those standards involve every area of life. What God is doing here in Deuteronomy 30—it is so plain—is urging us to be serious and deliberate in choosing.

He is telling us that where morality is involved, there is no such thing as remaining neutral. In broad strokes, the issues are sharply defined by Him—obedience, disobedience; life, death; good, evil. All of these (and actually a little more) are contrasted to one another, and we are charged—required—to commit and to make decisions. He especially points out that He will not be tolerant of idolatry. Idols are vanity.

Now let's go back to the New Testament once again to II Peter 3:1-6 as we begin to swing this back more specifically to the sovereignty issue.

II Peter 3:1-6 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days [we're in them] scoffers, walking after their own lusts, [their own desires] And saying; Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.

What Peter is saying, is that because the Creator God truly is sovereign, He is constantly moving His creation (including us) toward the conclusion of the purpose He determined from the beginning. He (Peter) has stated that all things don't continue as they were. That is a lie the scoffers are spreading about. Peter is saying God is intervening; He is making adjustments—adjustments in the course of events, both national and personal. It is God who sets the bounds of nations' habitations.

He sets their time, and He tells us in the book of Deuteronomy that He does it according to the number of the children of Israel. Again, just reflecting back on the book of Genesis—before you get past chapter ten, the flood has already occurred and the tower of Babel occurs, which are two vivid and early examples (instances) of God's intervention in the affairs of men. That's why Peter mentions it here so that we can reflect back to the beginning of the book. This is just an example. That's all he's saying. It's happening almost constantly. God is managing. God is governing His creation.

Now when we left off the last sermon on sovereignty, I was showing you how the Bible

acknowledges how God moves events to suit His purpose. We're going to review that by going back to the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turns it whithersoever he will.

He turns the heart (the mind, the thinking processes of the king) wherever He wills—wherever God wills. This is what the *Living Bible* translates that verse into:

Proverbs 21:1 (*Living Bible*) "Just as water turns into irrigation ditches, so the Lord directs the king's thoughts. He turns them wheresoever He wants to."

As you can think of water flowing through an irrigation ditch, it has a gate on it. All the farmer has to do to direct the water where he wants it to go, is to change the gate to direct the water to go in this field or that field. That's what this proverb is saying God does with the king. He moves the king to make decisions to move the entire nation to go in a certain direction.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Now He turns the king's heart. What about your heart? Why is it important that we guard our heart? Well, because out of it are the issues of life. What that means in the Hebrew is the impulses that influence and determine the nature of a person's life. We might call it attitudes today—inclinations, drives.

So, those drives, those attitudes, those inclinations motivate us, move us, incline us to go in certain directions; and again Solomon is telling us to keep it, guard it, so that out of it flows the right kind of things.

Proverbs 23:7 For as he [it could be the king, it could be you, it could be another person] thinks in his heart [out of which come the issues of life—the motivations, the inclinations, the attitudes, the impulses] so is he: Eat and drink, says He to you; but his heart is not with you.

So we put these three thoughts together, and what do we have? If the king's heart (representing the highest and most influential person in the nation) is in the hand of the Lord, and He (God) is influencing the nature of His decisions when it pleases Him, then is it not clear that all governors of men are completely beneath the governmental control of the Almighty? Absolutely.

Now this doesn't mean that God is directing their every thought. This doesn't mean that God is directing their every decision, but where it concerns God, He is influencing it because God is

directing things to the end that He has purposed. If He wills His creation to go in what ever direction He wants, that is the way it will go. No king is strong enough to turn Him aside.

I want you to think of this—this concept that all governmental control is under the hand of the Almighty. I don't know how much you are aware of the sovereign citizen concept, which is moving and gathering grass-roots force in certain elements of this nation. Even more importantly to us, it is a growing danger to some within the Church of God, because members are being deceived into ignorantly opposing the government of God by becoming part of this movement.

Matthew 17:24-27 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Does not your master pay tribute? [We're involved here with taxes.] He said, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus preceded him, saying, What think you, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter said unto him, Of strangers. Jesus said unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go you to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first comes up; and when you have opened his mouth, you shall find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and you.

Let's think of this in the light of sovereign citizenship—these people are refusing to pay their income tax, among other things. The direct issue here in this example of our Lord and Savior, who was the creator, is that every Jew over 20 was required to pay a half shekel per year, called the temple tax.

Now this will explain why Jesus asked Peter this question about the kings of the earth, because, here He was, the Creator, and in addition to this Jesus was the Lord—the owner of the temple. It was His. Peter rightly answered Him. Are the king's children free of taxes? Of course they are, because their father is king and he grants them that privilege of not having to pay any taxes.

So then others who are not his children pay taxes. Okay now. Jesus then applied that same reasoning to the temple and says, "Should not the members of My family be free of the temple tax, since I am Lord and Master, and I own it, and therefore Peter, you and the other disciples, as My children, My family...you should not have to pay the temple tax. Nevertheless," He says, "in order that we not offend them, go and pay it for both of us."

I bring this up because Jesus was not at all unfamiliar with illegal governments. The sovereign citizen people say that the government of the United States is illegal and, believe it or not they are on fairly solid ground. But who has the power?

So the sovereign citizenship group feels that the U.S. government is illegal. Okay now. Look at Jesus. He was under an illegal government in regard to the temple, because it was His, and His authority "had been usurped" by those who were not in it. Those who were not the powers in that temple had been placed in there by the governing authority (the political governing

authorities of the nation), which was wrong, which was also an illegal government.

So, on the one hand there was an illegal religious government, and on the other hand there was an illegal political government, because the Romans were there by dint of military conquest. It wasn't their land. They took it. God had given it to the Israelites, and God's grant had been ignored by the Romans, and so they just took it. Okay then. What did Jesus do? Jesus looked beyond a legal technicality to the true ruler—the Father.

It's His earth. Since God undoubtedly passed on what had occurred there in Judea, both in terms of the temple and the land itself (and we might even go so far as to say that He actually brought it to pass as a part of His overall purpose) Jesus, looking beyond that, submitted to God; not to the Romans, and not to Caiaphas and Annas—those who were sitting in the temple.

I Peter 2:19-23 For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief [of paying taxes], suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when you be buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? but if, when you do well, and suffer, for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; [here comes the important phrase] but [He] committed himself to Him that judges righteously.

This is not exactly the same context in I Peter 2 as in Matthew 17. It's not exactly the same context, but the principle applies in terms of our response to unjust treatment by governmental authority. Jesus did not defy them, nor did He attempt to overthrow them.

There is a reason why? a very clear reason why, and this is expressed in John the 19th chapter. We just read that Jesus committed Himself to Him who judges rightly—and that underlies these other things. His faith, His trust was in God—not in men.

John 19:10-11 Then said Pilate unto him, Speak you not unto me? [In other words, Why are you keeping quiet?] Know you not that I have power to crucify you, and have power to release you? Jesus answered, You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above: therefore he that delivered me unto you has the greater sin.

God gave Pilate the authority to sit in the seat of highest authority within the land itself, and though it was technically illegal because the Romans got there by conquest, Jesus Christ committed Himself to Him who judges rightly; therefore He understood that God permitted it, or maybe even brought it to pass (the Romans seated in power, in governmental authority, at that time). So it's very easily seen that Jesus considered God's overriding purpose as having first priority, and He did not want to put Himself in a position of defying—~~even to the death.~~

Now it's not hard, once you begin to see these principles, where Paul came up with the concepts

expressed in Romans 13: 1-7, or how Moses clearly understood that the actions of Korah and his group were a rebellion against God himself. They said, "Who made you a king and a ruler over us?" Moses didn't answer them directly, but it was God who had done it; and so to try to overthrow Moses was attempt to overthrow the decision of almighty God.

You know what happened to them. They went down into the pit. The earth opened and swallowed them up. Jesus didn't want to be fighting against God Himself, if God allowed the Romans to be there and if God allowed Caiphaz and Annas to sit in the seats of power in the high priesthood, ruling, as it were, right from the temple (of course, under the Romans).

I Samuel 8:7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto you: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.

So it doesn't matter to a son of God whether the government of his homeland is lawful, or let's say lawful in actually fact, or let's say "technically" illegal. What matters is that the Christian recognizes the sovereignty of God, and knows that if it has occurred, God wasn't asleep. God wasn't looking the other way. He is fully cognizant of what is going on and He permitted it. And if He permitted it (this One who is aware even of the sparrow falling) He then passed on it, or brought it directly to pass because of His purpose (the purpose that He is working out) and that is all that matters.

God is ruling His creation, and that is what we are here to learn. That's where Adam and Eve failed. That's where so many have failed, and this is what we are to put our faith in—God is sovereign over His creation.

Acts 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge you.

I read this verse (not because of its any particular importance here) to set the foundation before reading a couple of other verses about how often this thought of the sovereignty of God came up in the early church. It was an issue and it was extremely important to the first-century church. That's why they brought it up so frequently. Now, a verse you're going to recognize immediately is Acts 5: 29.

Acts 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Sovereignty once again. You can tell that they recognized that God was sovereign over His creation. The one who said that was the one who wrote what he did back there in I Peter 2. We're going to go back there again, but we're going to read what preceded that in I Peter 2.

I Peter 2:13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man.

Now look at this next phrase that follows.

I Peter 2:15-17 For so is the will of God, that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

Nowhere, brethren, does it say anywhere in God's word that we are to obey the king, honor the king, submit to the king? *only* if it is legal? It's not there. In the long view, it is legal, because God said it's legal. He passed on it. Now these people are giving Christianity a bad name. I am absolutely certain that they are unwittingly bringing governmental persecution upon the true Christians through a "guilty by association" principle. In other words, if you are also Christian and your loyalty is to God above, you must be just like these other folks who are rebelling against the government. We are going to be stamped, painted with the same brush. But there's comfort—I think, very much comfort—in a verse that appears back in Proverbs 21.

Proverbs 21:30-31 There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD. [There is nothing that can supersede His genius, His wisdom, His love, His purpose. There is no counsel against God that will stand.] The horse is prepared against the day of battle. [There can be all kinds of military preparations.] But safety is of the LORD.

Daniel thought that. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego thought that. That's the way Jesus Christ thought, and that's the way those men all acted. They were willing to give up their lives for a God they couldn't see, but believed was sovereign—sovereign over lands, sovereign over roaring fires, sovereign over crucifixion. That's the issue. The sovereignty issue has been the issue that has dominated life on this earth, at least of terms of God's purpose. But safety is with God.

Let's go back to the book of Job, chapter 23. I'm going through this because I don't want us to somehow or another get caught up in the excitement of what these sovereign citizen people are doing, and end up fighting God when He is bringing out some measure of governmental change.

We don't know how great the change is going to be. We only know that God's prophecies show that a major change in the governments in the world is coming and the things we are seeing may be just precursors of what is going to occur.

Job 23:8-9 Behold, I go forward, but He is not there [The "he" is God...and what this is, is a complaint that the perplexed Job made in regard to the situation that he found himself in. His life had suddenly become topsy-turvy.]; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: On the left hand, where He does work, but I cannot behold Him; He hides Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him.

Job wondered "Where was God?" in all of this. But, this he was confident of (at least intellectually)...

Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

Now Job did have that as a measure of his understanding, but he was still perplexed about what he was going through.

Job 23:11-14 My foot has held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. But He is in one mind, and who can turn him? [Nobody!] and what His soul desires, even that He does. For He performs the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with Him.

Job did have a measure of confidence that God was still on His throne, even though he was perplexed by what he was going through and trying to figure out "Why is this happening to me?" Then he says something in verse 1 of chapter 24 that might apply to me and you. It might apply to anybody who is observing, let's say, what church members are doing. He says:

Job 23:1 Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know Him... [Who knows God? His son should know Him.] not see his days? [God is unique. Who can make Him change? "Who can turn Him?" Job says. Now the times in verse one means "the events of life".] Seeing the events of life are not hidden from the Almighty, do they [we'll say in this case, Christians] that know Him, not see that these things are [not] hidden from God? And why do those to whom God has revealed Himself still sin, because just as surely as the sun comes up each morning, these things will be JUDGED.

Does that make sense to you? It makes sense to me. He is saying in effect that, if we know God, why do we let ourselves get away with sin, because God will judge it in His good time. Of course we understand that God will try to work things that will bring about repentance before He has to come down on us. Our actions, our attitudes do not escape Him. That's what Job is saying. Why do we let ourselves do these things, as though God isn't sovereign and that as though God is not aware.

Now recall a few things from God's word that show that He is in charge and that nobody stays Him from carrying out His purpose. Nimrod attempts to build a tower and unite mankind under one government. God sweeps it away so easily by confusing tongues. He makes communication too difficult. A real personal thing to Jacob was that Esau burned with anger against him; but when next they meet, Esau whoops for joy at seeing his brother. Who turned his heart?

Balaam is sent to curse Israel, but God compels him to bless. Haman builds a gallows for Mordecai, but is hanged from it himself. Jonah resisted God's will—but look what happened to him. God has ways of bringing us around to where we think like He does. Let's look at quite a specific example. I know that for all of you who have been in the church for quite a period of time that you're familiar with the theme that is in Isaiah the 10th chapter. Let's look at it.

Isaiah 10:5-8 O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him [Assyria] against an hypocritical nation [Judah], and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit, he means not so, neither does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. For he says, Are not my princes altogether kings?

A little bit of explanation before we go any further? So here we have a prophecy of Israel and of God's intention of using Assyria to punish Israel. What we have here is an example of how God intervenes in the affairs of men to bring about His purpose. In verse 7, He even prophesies that Assyria won't want to cooperate with Him.

Isaiah 10:12-16 Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord has performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks [his pride]. For he says, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasuries, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: And my hand has found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathers eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. [They didn't want to do it, but after they did it, they took credit for doing it. We did it," God prophesies that they're going to say. And then comes God's judgment.] Shall the axe boast itself against Him that hews therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against Him that shakes it? as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood. Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under His glory He shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.

The lesson we can learn from this is that they were only able to do what they did, God says, in overcoming Israel, because He empowered them—therefore they should not boast. That's how He intervenes to carry out His will. He brings individuals and He brings entire nations to bear in the direction that He wants them to go.

Like I said earlier, it doesn't mean that God is intervening and directing *every* activity of the leader of a nation. But when it becomes needful, God, from His sovereign position, has the

power to make them do what He wants. Not even the most powerful individual in the nation (the one who commands all the armies that may contain millions of men and all kinds of equipment)—can turn Him aside from what He wants to carry out. His will *will* be done.

Psalm 2:1-7 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? [a foolish thing; an empty thing, a profitless thing.] The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD has said unto me, You are my Son; this day have I begotten you.

So His counsel to you and me in verse 12 is:

Psalm 2:12 Kiss the Son, [submit to Him] lest he be angry, and you perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

Safety is in the Lord. God's will *will* be done. God is infinitely above all of the greatest of confederacies and conspiracies, and the most extensive and vigorous efforts to overthrow the plans of the Almighty will be blown away like so much dust. So God laughs at man's puny attempts to rule without consideration of Him—their Creator—in whom they live, and move and have their being.

Now I covered God's sovereignty in whom He calls into His family and salvation, several sermons ago; but I want to approach this again in order that we be humbled yet further at what He has given us that will help us take the Passover spirit right on through the entire year.

In Jonah 2:9 it says "Salvation [deliverance] is of the Lord."

But why does He call some, and not others? Why does He call one of a family, and not a whole family? And at other times it seems that He calls the whole family, and doesn't call one person in another family? We all have the inclination to wonder about those things and maybe our mind begins to think that maybe they're too depraved, or that maybe they don't need God to call them.

The Apostle Paul said in I Timothy 1:15 that he (Paul) was the chief of sinners. Now God put that in His word. I guess it's accurate, but yet God overcame him. God knew which button to push (as it were) in Paul, and Paul humbly submitted to Him. God can overcome the worst of people, and He has ways to push their buttons and begin to make them make choices that are favorable to the Creator.

Job 21:14-15 Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of your ways. [Sinners who do this.] What is

the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?

Is it because some people are too stony hearted that God can't reach them in some way? Again, God says in the book of Ezekiel that He is going to remove the stony heart out of man and He is going to replace it with a heart of flesh—a heart and mind that is yielded. There was a time that you, without your knowledge, were saying, "I will not have this One to rule over me."

But that's changed, hasn't it? You didn't know that you were saying it, but you were saying it, right along with Korah or anybody else, because your heart was at enmity against God. Now, if it happened to you, why can't it happen to anybody? I'll tell you why. We're going to look at four very impressive scriptures in this regard. Let's go to I Corinthians, chapter 15 (the resurrection chapter). Paul is the one who is writing this, and he says:

I Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am.

What was he? He was an apostle—a servant of the church, a slave of Almighty God? a man whose heart, whose mind, whose direction of life did a 180 degree turn it seems, almost in the flash of lightning. His mind began to change. "By the grace of God I am what I am." We can pick something up here. Grace has something to do with why you are sitting here, listening, and why your heart has changed toward Him.

I Corinthians 15:10 I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Now he begins to tell us that everything that he was doing, everything he had accomplished, was being done by the grace of God in him. Let's look at another one.

I Corinthians 15:22-23 For as in Adam all die [everybody], even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Now, important in regard to this particular sermon regarding the sovereignty of God and why you are sitting here, and why some are here and some are not here...we have already begun to see the grace of God made the Apostle Paul what he is. Now we find out that each person comes into contact with the grace of God in his own order. Who determines that order? The Sovereign Creator determines that order.

I Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you to differ from another?

Why are you converted and your mate is not? Why are you converted and your children are not? Why are you converted and your parents are not? Why are you converted and your neighbors

are not?

I Corinthians 4:7 Who makes you to differ from another? and what have you that you did not receive?

He's asking this of church members.

I Corinthians 4:7 Now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?

It wasn't you who put you in this position. It was the grace of God (I Corinthians 15:10)?each person in his own order. That order is ordained by the Creator. "Who made you to differ?" He means in this way, who made you to differ spiritually? "What did you have that you did not receive?"

I John 5:19-20 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true.

I'll tell you brethren, we don't have a leg to stand on before God. God made the choice for us, in a sense, so easy, by making us see that this was the only way we could go. We made the choice, and it's good that we did. He has given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. But let's add to it. .

II Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

Now it's very obvious that some believe and others don't—and even within the church. If there is any book that shows that clearly, it's the one that we just left there in I Corinthians. I am sure that that is because of many reasons too. Now let's look at another scripture that has very important ramifications to this subject.

Acts 13:44-46 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

Do you understand what that says? The only ones who can BELIEVE are the ones that God CHOOSES to believe! Ordained means *appointed*, or *predestined*—and this agrees perfectly with Romans 8 and verses 28 and 29, and with Ephesians 1 and verse 5. Let's string a couple more scriptures together.

I Timothy 1:2 Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now what is there in that verse that has bearing on this subject of our calling—that has bearing on our being ordained? It's a three-letter word. It's the word "the." The definite article the. "My own son in the faith." A very specific, definite faith. Now turn a couple of pages to Titus the 1st chapter, and in verse 1.

Titus 1:1 Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.

"According to the faith."

Titus 1:13 This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.

How about II Thessalonians 3:2 which we just read. Do you know what? I read it in the *King James* and the "the" wasn't there. Do you know what? In the Greek it's there. If you want to prove it, just get an interlinear. Not all men have the faith. Now what this all means in regard to the sovereignty of God is that only those God elects to open the eyes of, believe unto salvation. In other words, even the faith that saves is a gift from God.

We would never believe unto salvation without it. If you want to study this out, you can do this, and you will notice there is faith on the one hand, and as I showed you from just a few places from Paul's letters, there is the faith on the other?and this is a singular faith. It is a faith that trusts, and eventually as it grows, it will trust God all the way till death. There is a faith that will believe, and yet it is described by James as "being dead."

There is the faith given to those ordained unto salvation that not only believes and works—because it trusts. It relies upon the truth of the message of salvation and God's purpose. Now we have to ask the question..."Is God fair?" Do you know that Paul spent three chapters in the book of Romans addressing this (Romans 9, 10, and 11)? We'll just look at one particular place here in Romans 9:19.

Romans 9:19-21 You will say then unto me, Why does he yet find fault? [Is God fair?] For who has resisted his will? No but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump?

Notice that "of the same lump." A potter can take the same piece of clay and he can make one vessel that is beautiful, and another that is ugly, out of the same lump of clay. Now you apply that to what Paul is talking about. We're all flesh and blood, and if we want to really get specific—the same lump might be the same family.

And so mother is converted, but dad isn't. That's what he's saying. Is God fair when He does that? Does the potter not have the right to do whatever He wants with His creation? That's what Paul is arguing. One of a house. One of a family. One of a nation, maybe.

Romans 9:20-23 "Who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.

That's you and me! Brethren, this is stunning! Now we have to ask the question, which we've all asked—"Why me, and not him?" *I don't know!* Neither does anybody else, because that is the point in all of this. God makes the choice on the basis of His own will, and He makes it very clear that He is not going to tell us why He chose us.

Do you know why? Because if He did, we would probably find some reason to brag about it, even if we were the scum of the earth. We would say, "God chose me because I was scum." Now I'm going to prove this to you. Human nature always wants to know why. Human nature is so vain we will turn something ugly into something beautiful because it puffs us up.

I Corinthians 1:26-30 For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen [that's the second time] the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen [that's the third time], yes, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are you in Christ Jesus...[but of Him completely and totally God's act of mercy, of grace.]

So don't even bother thinking about it. You will never know the answer. Maybe in His kingdom, when we will have the mind to be able to contain it and understand it and not get vain about it—not get puffed up about it—He'll tell us why He chose us. But we will never know. Now instead, what does He want us to do? He wants us to simply glory in the fact that He has given it to us.

I don't mean glory in the sense of being puffed up. I mean glory in the sense of being humbled and being thankful, that we who are nothing have received the greatest gift a human can be given. Nothing greater can be given to a human being...until that time of the transformation comes, and then we'll see the realization of it.

I hope that from this we can begin to understand that an opportunity has been given to us that has been given to so few people—the opportunity to be humbled before the Creator and to willingly give our lives to Him in making the choices necessary to submit where He has already shown the right way to go. If we do that, we will, through His power, become in His image and we will guarantee by our submitting, and by God's grace, that we will be a son of God in His kingdom.