

## The Sovereignty of God (Part 10)

### Attitudes Toward

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We have come to the place in this series on The Sovereignty of God where it is time to begin drawing some very clearly stated conclusions. This particular sermon will cover what our attitude ought to be given the sovereignty of God. I especially want us to understand the practical application that comes from understanding the truth of God's His sovereignty over His creation and His purpose.

Now it is my fervent hope that these things that we have learned should not merely satisfy some idle curiosity, but that they should edify. Edify means *to build up*. It should also inspire us to come to the place where we will actually be motivated to do something.

I have not given these messages merely as an explanation for John Ritenbaugh's rationale regarding the government of God; rather, I am hoping that a true recognition of God's sovereignty will humble us. Perhaps even stun and shock us into a far greater and intense willingness to yield and relinquish a little bit more—maybe a great deal more—of our self-will. To take delight in this resignation, knowing that our life (our destiny) is being shaped by the ever-living, ever-watchful, greatest intelligence—the most powerful Being—the kindest character that exists in all of the universe.

Without a good recognition of the sovereignty of God, we cannot really be at peace. We cannot exercise faith. We cannot overcome fear. We cannot really grow into the image of God. Because the self is constantly going to intrude *so strongly* that God's purpose—God's calling—is going to be shoved to the back burner of importance in our lives.

So it is good that we understand that this subject of the sovereignty of God includes more than Him simply exercising His government. It includes everything that makes Him God. It is about His Godhead—His very being. Once you begin to get a handle on this subject, you begin to see the sovereignty of God expressed all through the Bible. It *seemingly* is on almost every page.

The word sovereign came into the English language through the French, but it really has its roots in Latin. The word sovereign consists of two words that have been put together. The prefix, meaning *super* and the main body of the word meaning *to exercise authority—to dominate*. So it literally means, *super domination* if we just apply the root words.

But there are better usages of it—I mean more explanatory. When you put the two of them together, they mean, *of the most exalted kind, superlative in quality, undisputed ascendancy, unlimited in extent*. My dictionary said that the synonym for sovereign is "*dominant free*." Perhaps it will help you to understand if I tell you what the antonym for the word sovereign is. It is *subject*. When we say that God is sovereign, it means that He is *not subject* to anything, any being—anything.

There is nothing that constrains Him to do anything that He desires. He is totally free. Now

apply that to yourself?if you are honest with yourself you are going to know that you are not totally free—that you are subject to many things. But the thing that we want to be subject most to is the Sovereign God of all creation. Now sovereignty is the state of being in these conditions.

It felt especially interesting to me?revealing, I guess would be a better way to say it?to see what happened when some of the greats of the Bible were brought face to face with this issue. Quite a number of them were. We are only going to turn to two of them. The first one is Job. I just want to read one verse in chapter 1 of God's own evaluation of this man.

Job 1:8 And the LORD said unto Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth.

None like him! This was one unique human being. "There is none like him in the earth."

Job 1:8 There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God, and eschews [shuns] evil?

Now jump all the way back to the end of the book, in chapter 42. While you are there, if you know the verses, you might recall Ezekiel 14:14 where Ezekiel describes Job as being among the most righteous who have ever lived. He links him with Noah and with Daniel. These men, at the time of the end, when the latter days come upon us (the Tribulation) could deliver only themselves by their righteousness.

We are talking about somebody who was very, very close to God. He turned his closeness to God into obedience. God said that there was none like him. This does not mean that Job was flawless. It does not mean that he was perfect and had no growing to do. The place that he had reached was very good in God's eyes, but there was something that God wanted Job to understand about life. We are not going to go into that, but it involved God's sovereignty.

It involved God's right to do anything that He wanted to do, with anybody, at any time. So by the time that we get to Job the 38th chapter, God begins speaking in the first person, and apparently He directed His comments at Job verbally. Now if you would read through this, you would find that God asked Job 83 questions that Job could not answer.

There was a lot that Job did not know, and there was an awful lot that Job did not have power over. "Yes, Job. *Where were you when I hung the earth out there on nothing?*" "Where were you when the morning stars sang." "Where were you when I stretched the line upon the earth?" He goes on and on, through 83 questions, with only one brief pause (I believe after 59 of them) where Job finally spoke up and said "I am going to keep my mouth shut." That is basically what he said.

Here he was confronted face to face with real perfection, real holiness, real righteousness, intelligence of the highest degree, mercy unlimited, compassionate—compassion in awesome amounts.

Job 42:1-5 Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that you can

do everything, and that no thought can be withheld from you. Who is he that hides counsel without knowledge? [Why, it was Job—or anybody else who fits in that category.] therefore have I uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech you, and I will speak: I will demand of you, and declare you unto me. I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye sees you.

Now, did he literally see Him? I really do not think that he literally saw. But even if he did, that was not what impressed him. In this case, what impressed him was the ind of God. Now look what happened to Job. As great as he was, as righteous as he was...

Job 42:6 Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

The flaw in Job's understanding was God's right to use people as He saw fit. Of course, we understand that anytime He uses anybody in any circumstance, it is going to be for their good, even when they have to go through pain, like Job did. That was something that Job did not grasp at the time. Even though he was a very righteous man, God was still entitled, He was still free, He was not subject to Job's righteousness. He was free to use Job as He saw fit.

And out of this, brethren, because He used Job in this way, has come a priceless lesson for everyone of us. I am sure that God was thinking of that—that He was thinking of those who would come after Job, and that everybody could learn from the experience that He put Job through.

Now it has become part of our understanding. Just because you go through a deep trial, it does not mean that you are sinning, or are sinful, or unrighteous. Imperfect, yes; but it does not mean that God is against you. It may mean that He is really for you. Really, really for you.

Isaiah 6:1-2 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly.

Now down to verse 5—after this awesome vision:

Isaiah 6:5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

This was a little bit different circumstance from the one that Job found himself in, but the result was the same. What better way to kick off the ministry of Isaiah than in this way? Do you realize what was happening when this occurred? He dates it. "In the year that king Uzziah

died." King Uzziah was a righteous king, until his pride got the best of him, and he tried to make those sacrifices and do the job of the Levites (of the priests). God struck him with leprosy for his impious act.

He was horning in on doing something that he should have never done. But overall in his life, he was a good king. There was no doubt about it. In the last couple years of his reign though—because Uzziah, a good king, did not have his hand on the throttle of government—things were going to pot fast in the hands of his son, and there was nothing that Uzziah could do. Do you know why? Because he was a leper, he was not allowed out in public. People could not come into him. He could not go out to them. So he could not rule. He was shut up, like lepers were.

So things went down hill fast in the hands of a son who was not near the man that Uzziah was in his relationship with God. So Uzziah, feared the worst, knowing things were going to pot—to immorality fast, and that the people were losing contact with God in Judah. So what God did was that He showed Isaiah—*"I have a big job for you to do, and I am going to introduce to you the real ruler of the universe—the real ruler of Judah."*

So there is no doubt, that even though Isaiah was greatly humbled by what he saw—what he witnessed—he was also greatly strengthened because he knew that regardless what happened after that, things were still in the mighty hands of God. That allowed him to exercise his faith, knowing that God was going to be with him. Now Isaiah was made to feel filthy by witnessing the holiness of God, so he was humbled, even as Job was humbled.

Now is humbling us *all* that God wants to result from recognizing a measure of the sovereignty of God? Is there anything further that should develop from this? Should other characteristics evolve from being humbled through recognition of His very being?

Well, the answer to that is there should be more—very important qualities to our spiritual, moral, and ethical growth. Without a doubt, the first in order of importance that should grow out of this is the fear of God. Why is it that people are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God? Why is it that people are so indifferent to the state of their well-being? Why is it that the Bible has been relegated into nothing more than a coffee table display in many homes? Why is it that there is so much defiance of heaven, and so little concern about sin?

Paul quotes David in Romans 3:10. Now if there is a better listing of what mankind is like, I would like to know where it is. Paul says, quoting David:

Romans 3:10-18 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit: the poison of asps is under their lips. Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

It almost looks to me like that last one is intended as a summation of all that preceded it. Now answer this for yourself. From your experience, do the churches today teach the fear of God? Have they in their teaching turned Him into a divine, benign, snugly teddy bear? Now God's own word says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Yet, much of the ministry out there seems to do all it can to blunt the force of that word fear although it means in the Hebrew *exactly* what it means in the English.

The word encompasses everything from grudging respect to outright care. Look what it did when Isaiah feared God. Look what it did when Job feared God in recognition of His sovereignty. Now God's own word says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Outright terror does not make for a good relationship, does it? Nor does faint respect a good relationship make.

Do you know why? Because neither one of those extremes will win the other person's heart. So what good is it if God terrorizes us? Does that elevate you and me? Not at all. Neither does it put God in the right place, when all we have is a faint and grudging respect for Him. There has to be a balance here.

So what is it that He wants? He wants a deep, abiding (living, continuing) reverential awe of Him, because God is more than one who merely has the power to crush. He is also good, kind, gentle, loving, merciful, compassionate, and wise.

Now we Americans especially, have been taught to be very familiar with, and casual in our attitudes toward others, and unfortunately that carries over into our attitude toward, and our relationship with God. It is sort of the "I am as good as you are" approach. That is not the question.

That misses entirely. But what happens out of this is a disrespectful and even a defiant attitude which is carried over into our relationship with God. If you think "defiant" is too strong, maybe you had better consider that He says, "the carnal mind is enmity against God." That IS defiant.

That is His testimony of us. Now, are we just as good as anybody else? What is the Bible's counsel? I said earlier that misses the point. Paul's counsel to you and me is:

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind [humility] let each esteem others better than themselves.

Now that is the counsel from God. It is not "I am as good as you." Do you know why? Because the "I am just as good as you" concept is not going to produce unity. It is not going to produce the right kind of fellowship. Our approach to one another (in fellowship) has to be "*the other is better than me,*" because that puts us into a servant-oriented approach. So it is not "I am just as good as you, buddy." That misses the point.

Here's Peter's instruction:

I Peter 2:17 Honour all men.

When you honor somebody, you pay respect to them. There is a very interesting etymology to this word honor. Basically what it means is, *to place a value upon*. So, if you are honoring somebody, you are placing a value on them that is higher than your own station in life. Otherwise, you would not be giving honor. Peter agrees exactly with Paul, because that is what Jesus taught them.

I Peter 2:17 Love the brotherhood.

If we think we are better than somebody else, is that love? Hardly. But what do you do with God? You FEAR God! That puts Him in a different category altogether—one in which there is to be a deep and an abiding awe for. You honor men; but for God there is awe—out of respect for His holiness, out of respect for His mercy and compassion and pity, out of respect for His authority as Creator, and His authority as the Head of His family. You honor the king, the same as you do other men. Now, is there much in the preaching that you heard before you were converted, that would lead you to stand in awe of the majesty of God?

Now is the fear of God something that we think only the unconverted need? Proverbs 1:7 says that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and wisdom (the definition or usage of it from the Bible in its simplest form) means "right application." See, being wise is doing the right thing, regardless of the circumstance. Now the beginning of being wise, the beginning of doing the right thing you see, is fear—the fear of God.

We begin to see a chain forming. Humility leads to the fear of God, which in turn leads to wisdom. They follow in sequence to one or the other. If you fear God, you act on His advice, you act on His instruction. You do it because you fear Him. You respect what He is saying, and hold it in such awe, that you are willing to do it. That is being wise, regardless of what men do.

Is the fear of the Lord something only the unconverted need on their way to conversion? No. There is nobody who needs it more than we do—His own children! So we need the fear of God. It has to be part of this chain that leads to a right relationship with Him. So reverential awe is the beginning. It is wisdom's foundation, because it moves us to obedience.

Philippians 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling.

Salvation is worked out through fear, which leads to wisdom, which leads to obedience. Was there not a time brethren, when we called a person that we knew believed in God, God-fearing? At that time it was not the unconverted who needed the fear of God. It was the *converted* who already were God-fearing. Why did people do that? Why did they call them that? Because that is what marked their relationship with God. People could see that person feared God. They really respected Him.

Do you want God to have mercy on you? Do you want God to have pity on you?

Psalm 103:13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pities them that fear him.

We all want God to be compassionate toward us, and His compassion goes to those who have a deep, reverential awe of Him.

Now we are told to walk in Christ's steps. He gives the model after which we are to pattern our lives. We are to imitate Him. Was fear ever used in reference to Him and His relationship with God? Well, it most certainly was?in Hebrews the 5th chapter, where it says:

Hebrews 5:7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that [or because] he feared he feared.

Now, the lesson: Do we want God to hear our prayers? Fear Him .

Are you beginning to see where a recognition of the sovereignty of God fits in? It is a major player in our growth and salvation. It is a major player in pleasing God. It is a major player in getting us to the place where we have a good relationship with God. It is not that we are sniveling slaves at His feet. It is rather that we dutifully respect Him, and because we do, we are willing to submit our lives—the way that we live them—into His hand.

In the beginning is the fear of God. The fear of God produces wisdom . Wisdom is right application. Right application is obedience. Jesus Christ obeyed God perfectly. So His fear then was not an occasional one like we are wont to have, rather it was something that was built throughout the entirety of His life. Now it had to be this way because as Jesus went along in His life the tests, the trials, the temptations became more intense as he aged.

Now our perception of God's sovereignty begets (gives birth to) Godly fear, which in turn begets implicit obedience. We run into a problem here because we are filled with a sense of our own importance. In short—with pride and rebellion. But the corrective to this is that we have to be able to see ourselves in relation to perfection—to God. I want you to think about that. This is what caused Isaiah to do what he did, to throw himself on the ground and to say, "I am filthy."

This is what led Job to do what he did. He said, "I hate myself." Now their problem, or their hating themselves was not a psychological one. It came from the very depths of their being and was a balanced evaluation of themselves against God (in contrast to God). There are people with psychological problems who hate themselves. I am not talking about that. That is a mental illness where they are overburdened with guilt.

Anybody who knows God and who loves God and believes God knows that his sins are forgiven and he is not loaded with guilt, because he knows, and knows that he knows that his sins are forgiven. He takes God at His word. So we are not talking about that at all. It is our perception of God's sovereignty that begets Godly fear, which in turn begets implicit obedience. So the corrective of this is to be able to see our self in relation to God. This is important, for we will

either glory in God, or our self. We will either live to serve Him, or our self.

Do you think that I have gone too far? Jesus said that no man can serve two masters, that he will either love one, and hate the other; cling to one, and let the other go. So we cannot serve two masters. Now please do not get depressed in this, because this is something that we have to grow into. When Isaiah and Job went through their experiences they were very mature in the faith, as we would say. Usually, when we are converted and through many years of growth, we only catch a tiny glimpse of God's holiness.

So it is something that should increase in intensity and clarity. God gives us plenty of time. He is patient with us so that we can grow in our understanding of His purity as well as His power, and all the other attributes as well.

So we can reach a conclusion to this point. Godly reverence produces obedience. Obedience produces Godly character and makes us into the image of God (when we use our free moral agency to yield to God).

Therefore, irreverence will do what? It will produce disobedience. There is a very good example of this in Exodus the 5th chapter.

Exodus 5:1-2 And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus says the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.

I think that we can almost go to the point of saying that Pharaoh's response was not merely irreverent, but it was sarcastic—almost smart-alecky. To Pharaoh, Moses' God was only one among many gods. I want you to consider this, because the Israelites were in Egypt for many hundreds of years, and Pharaoh was not just born one minute before this. He was aware of the history of Egypt.

He was aware of the history of Israel being in Egypt, and how they got there. He knew about Joseph. Those things were available to those people. He knew about the God of Joseph. He knew about the God of the Israelitish people. He was not born in a vacuum, and he was not put into this position without knowledge of what was going on within his own nation. So, it was not that Pharaoh had not heard God's name. What is meant here, by his reply, is that he did not recognize God's authority.

He did not recognize God's sovereignty, would be another way of putting it. In that reply Pharaoh set the tone for everything that followed. It is interesting to note that in Isaiah 19, right at the end of the chapter, that God says, "In that day Egypt will know me."

God did not forget what Pharaoh said. "*Who is the Lord?*" And so, as only God can do, He is going to make the Egyptians know him, in a very special way. All of those plagues that came upon Egypt had their genesis in Pharaoh's reply, "Who is the Lord?" Well, God showed him who the Lord is.

When it was over I think Pharaoh respected the Lord; he was not converted, but he respected Him (sort of like Yul Brenner said, "Moses' God is God" in The Ten Commandments. An appropriate remark.) So then, if irreverence begets disobedience, then true reverence will beget, or promote obedience. This is why growing to know God is so important. "This is eternal life," Jesus said in John 17: 3, "that they should know you, the only true God." So this is a major step toward Godliness.

Now it is the Bible—the "Book"—along with God's holy spirit (these major elements) that promote our knowledge of His mind and will.

Psalm 119:18 Open you my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

See—"Open my eyes, that I might be able to see them," because they are in the Bible, God's word. Out of His law, out of His instruction (His teaching) comes the knowledge of God and describes Him in detail (His character, His mercy). It gives us insight into what He is willing to do, wants to do, and what He is going to do with our lives. That is how we get to know Him.

Now what does the spirit do? It guides us into all truth. If we want that truth, it cannot only be experiential. Far too many people want to get knowledge of God through the experiences of life. That is fine, but there also has to be *a major study* of God's word, because that encompasses and compresses the amount of time needful for really getting to know God.

We cannot live long enough for Him take us through all the experiences that we can have crammed into His word. So the Psalmist says, "Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." On the other hand we can't let the knowledge of God come solely from the study of His word. There has to be both.

Psalm 119:33-34 Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; yes, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

Psalm 119:36 Incline my heart unto your testimonies, and not to covetousness.

Now this Psalm, perhaps above all others, makes a multitude of direct connections between the knowledge of God and obedience, and sometimes the fear of God is also mentioned. Now what God wants us to understand is that the entire Bible is aimed at each and every individual. So it is not right for us to pick and choose favorite scriptures, and leave others alone—like leave the "begets" alone.

They are so boring, but they are there for some reason. I do not know why, but they are there. I know to me, they are boring to read, and I force myself to read some of them every once in a while. But I have to admit I have to force myself to do it. That is not my thing—reading genealogies. But it is there for some reason, so it is part of the instruction of God. So we cannot just pick and choose favorite places, because then we become narrow in regard to the mind of

God, of really knowing Him.

We live by every word of God, because all that reveals some of Him. So the more we know Him, the higher the chance of obedience. Ignorance begets irreverence, which begets disobedience. Knowledge begets reverence, which begets obedience.

Now again, looking at our model—was Jesus known for His submission to God's will? We are actually within a second area that the sovereignty of God produces the fear of God, and it also produces implicit obedience. Again, not all at once. It is something that we grow into, but it will produce implicit obedience (i.e. obedience without holding back; not grudgingly).

I chose to read this next verse to show how far Jesus' obedience went—I mean, obedience to the Father's will.

Philippians 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

So, His submission to God's will went all the way to the death. Now His obedience was a conscious, intelligent choice. It was a conscious, intelligent choice, and I am going to prove that to you from His own words?in John the 10th chapter.

John 10:17-18 Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. [Notice the wording here.] No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself.

He laid down His life of His own free will. His obedience was a conscious, intelligent choice. He was not just blindly doing things. He was not an actor on the stage of life. He was consciously choosing to go in the direction that He did motivated by His fear of God. And of course He loved God. This begins to encompass other aspects as well. But He humbled Himself all the way to death, even though He was the One through whom the creation came into being.

John 10:18 I have power to lay it down, [so do we] and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Jesus was no zombie, just woodenly going through life. What he did, He did with feeling. There are places that we can turn to there. One of the most obvious is in the garden of Gethsemane, there in Luke the 22nd chapter where it says that He bled great drops of blood.

So intense was His feeling during the prayers that He was lifting up to God there. You have to understand that He was going through this in the prime of His manhood. He was in perfect health. He had undoubtedly heard of or read of crucifixions. He may have even witnessed one, because it was something that was entered into from time to time by the