

## The Sovereignty of God (Part 12)

### Conclusion

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Today I am going to continue in the Sovereignty of God series. In fact it is my intention to conclude it.

Revelation 19:6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigns.

"Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigns."

If there is any verse that catches the essence of the theme of this series, I think that it is this one, or it is one that is quite similar. We of course understand that the fullness of His reign has not yet been reached. Even though He ultimately rules everything, He has not chosen to reveal that to everyone so that they might, at some point, clearly choose to be ruled by Him and receive the benefits of His rule.

So indeed He is reigning even at this time, but not everybody understands that. I hope that you understand it and that you are making it a viable part of your life. I think that what I am going to tell you is an honest evaluation—that I have come to understand more things of inspirational and practical value of this way of life since the beginning of this series only four months ago; greater than any comparable period of time in my history of the Church of God, which goes all the way back to the 1950s.

One of the things that I have learned from this study, is that in all my years in the church I cannot recall ever hearing or giving a sermon in which the sovereignty of God was the major theme. That does not mean that there were not some given. I am saying that I never heard them, or I never gave them. What I mean of course, to make it even more specific, was this was directly mentioned and said as the specific purpose statement of the message.

I know that I had heard sermons that touched on the subject, without ever claiming to be a sermon on that subject. Therefore it is my conclusion that this is a very much needed subject to be spoken of—a subject that I feel has been very greatly neglected. Now on the other hand I do not want to be guilty of over-sowing this subject, without also reminding us of our responsibility, our accountability to God. If I continued on this subject (hitting it pretty hard week after week), there would be a tendency for a fatalism to be inculcated into our minds, because we would slowly but surely begin to think everything is totally predestined in our lives.

I want to let you know that while I do not believe that everything has totally been predestined, it is still a very much needed subject, and it is one that we have to make a part of our lives. Now answer this: Can you think of any cultures in this world that are dominated by the concept

of predestination? Believe it or not there are quite a number of them. In fact this dominates virtually every Islamic nation, and they believe their every action, their every word, their every thought—everything within their society—is predestined by God.

Now, where would you rather live? in a nation in which that concept is a lively part of the culture (and they think this way)? Think about what this kind of thinking has produced. Would you rather live in Iraq or Iran, in Syria, in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan? Or would you rather live in a western nation where at least some of the concepts of Christianity have become a part of the culture? Well, I think that just about everybody would rather live where the people recognize accountability to God to counter balance the concepts of predestination.

There is a problem in western cultures though—they have virtually lost sight of God's sovereignty. The result has been to exalt the creature—to exalt mankind at the expense of the Creator. Are you aware that very much doctrinal error has its roots in truth that is perverted, in truth that is wrongly divided, in truth that is disproportionally held in its relationship with other doctrines? What happens in a case like this is that some truth becomes so magnified to a person or a group that their whole (what shall I call it?) movement, or the institution, begins to revolve around that one doctrine, or that one concept. It becomes their pet doctrine.

In some cases it is so strong that the movement is named after the doctrine. Can you name any? How about baptism—of the Baptist church? How about Pentecostalism? How about Congregationalism? How about Episcopalianism? How about Methodism? Do you understand what I mean?

Well today, in the greater Church of God some are making issues of one doctrine or another a single doctrine. They will give you the impression that unless you accept that doctrine and make it a part of your life, you cannot be a part of the church. In these past four and one-half years I have seen some of them go from group to group, and they are still out there, with issues like the calendar, issues like government, issues like love even, or grace.

Now whatever happened to declaring the "whole counsel of God," so that we can be truly in the image of God? If you do not have the whole counsel, then what happens? How can we possibly be in the image of God? Let me give you an illustration. There are some people (male or female) who seem to be especially endowed with a beautiful face (handsome) or a body.

Now what would become of that beautiful face if one portion of it became disproportionately large? What if the right eye suddenly became twice as big as the left eye? Where did the beauty go? What if the nose took up the whole front of the face? Where did the beauty go? Do you see what I am driving at here? What I am driving at is this: beauty largely consists of proportion, and when things are not in right proportion, that is, right balance to one another, the beauty disappears. And thus it is with the beauty of holiness.

Our Father and His Son Jesus Christ, our elder brother, are the only ones in which there is perfect beauty—where everything is in perfect proportion in terms of their character, in terms of the way they act and react. Everything they do is beauty, including even the way that they look. We have not seen that yet, but I am sure that when we see them, they are going to be awesome in their beauty as well.

When this principle is put into the responsibility of a minister, he has to be very careful that he gives a balanced menu of subjects for people to feed on, and that he does not allow any doctrine to become the "pet"—the "ax to grind," because if he does, then he is not feeding the group that he is responsible for well. So it is the responsibility of the ministry to give balance to the teaching that is heard, and thus he takes a large step in making these people, or giving these people the opportunity to be in the image of God.

There are things in the Bible, which I am going to show you a very small portion of, in which things about God appear in contrast to one another—either things about God himself, or things about this way of life. Sometimes the contrasts are very obvious. At other times the contrasts are small—at least seemingly small. For instance in I John 1:5, John says "God is light," which means of course that in Him there is no sin at all. Perfect purity.

Everything about Him gives right direction to those who are observing Him. On the other hand, in I John 4:8, the same John, three chapters later, says, "God is love." These two are not quite the same thing, but they are still nonetheless different attributes or aspects of the same Being. Both of them need to be preached on in order for a balance to be there. But I want to show you one in Romans 11. This one is worth looking at, because here is a real contrast.

Romans 11:22 Behold therefore the goodness and the severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness: otherwise you also shall be cut off.

Looking at God from man's perspective, God is both good, and God is severe. There are times that He is gentle and kind; there are times that He is full of graciousness and respect for those who are His subjects. At other times He can be seen as somebody who has created a great deal of evil so that pain; a great deal of pain (severity) falls upon those that are also His subjects.

What happens to our image of God—our vision of God, our understanding of the nature of God, our concept of what God is like—if one aspect, one attribute of His is preached on to such an extent, while others are neglected? What if we always told you about the goodness of God, but never told you about the severity of God? Do you know what happens?

We turn God into a caricature of what He really is, and we get a false impression of God. You know what a caricature is? That is a picture that is cartoonish in its makeup in which one characteristic of the subject is emphasized, and it draws our attention. But this is not really what the subject looks like. It is only what the cartoonist made the subject look like.

Some well-known characters are then shown in political cartoons, for example, with exceptionally large ears, or great big eyes, or spectacles, you know, that stand out all over the place, or a great big nose, or a big mouth. Jimmy Carter's teeth. You get the picture. God is good, and He also is severe. We have to be aware of that, because Paul warns us that unless we continue in His goodness, we can be cut off. Do you know why?

God already warns us that He judges without respect to person. You need to consider that. He does not play favorites. We have to accept that. We have to live with it. It is part of the nature of our God. So, we cannot avoid that aspect of it.

Here is another one that is stated here in Philippians 2. This one is not nearly as important as the one that we just showed.

Philippians 2:7 But made himself [Jesus did] of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

In the incarnation Jesus took on Himself the form of a servant. But brethren, He was still God. You know what it says about Him in other places? This one, in Luke 2 is really interesting. It states there that even when He was a baby in the manger, He was "Christ the Lord." What a contrast between the humble servant and Christ the Lord. Humble servant; as a mature man; Christ the Lord, a baby. See the contrast? There are contrasts like this all over the Book.

Now in Galatians 6:2 is one that applies to you and me. It is where Paul, writing to these people says:

Galatians 6:2 Bear you one another's burdens.

There is a Christian responsibility.

Galatians 6:5 For every man shall bear his own burden.

That is an interesting contrast. What did he mean by that? That is part of our responsibility. When I say "our" I do not just mean the ministry. I mean every part of the body of Jesus Christ has to understand these two reconcile to one another, because it is a part of this way of life. On the one hand we have to bear one another's burden; on the other hand you are responsible yourself. They are in perfect balance there, once you understand.

Here is another one in Matthew 6:34. This one is in about the very middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus uttered these words. It actually appears in two verses.

Matthew 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

Matthew 6:34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

*"So do not worry. Do not worry about a thing. Do not be concerned. Just go on in your life. It means that you do not even have to get a job. God will take care of you. Do not worry about tomorrow. God will supply the food some way"*

Now you know it does not mean that. But if we take the words literally, exactly as they are

stated, without counter-balancing it with other scriptures like I Timothy 5: 8—"if anybody does not provide for his own, he is worse than an infidel." If you are going to provide for your own, *you* are going to provide for your own—God's not going to do it. You are going to do it. You see, it puts the burden right back on you. On the one hand God says do not worry; on the other hand He says worry, be concerned.

We can even go further than that, because back in the Proverbs He says that a man not only has to provide for his own, but he should lay up for his children's children. We are supposed to look so far ahead that we are setting money aside for our grandchildren. Now that is looking pretty far ahead, for most of us, anyway. You see what I mean about the Bible being full of contrasts? God is not one-dimensional. If we are going to get a good picture of Him, then all these various portions of His attributes, (we will make it broader) of His nature and what He is, need to be touched on from time to time.

We will take at least one more. This is, on the one hand, extremely encouraging. On the other hand, it makes me gulp. This is the extremely encouraging part:

John 10:27-29 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

Now does this not say that our salvation is absolutely secure? "*Relax, relax. Take it easy. You do not have to worry about it. Everything is all right.*" But what does it say in II Peter 2: 10? We are given a very strong implication there that it all depends on us, because Peter says:

II Peter 1:10 If you do these things, you shall never fall.

"If."

Now I will add another one that everybody knows. How about that one in Philippians 2 and in verse 12 where it says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"? Do you see the contrast that is there? On the one hand our salvation seems absolutely secure, and yet on the other hand it looks like it all depends on what we do.

This was rather a long (I guess you might say) aspect of this sermon. But it is awfully easy for a minister to make too much of one doctrine, at the expense of the whole. I will tell you frankly, the desire within me is to keep on going with this subject, because everywhere I look now I see it, and it is very encouraging to me, and I want to talk on it. I will tell you, it is getting difficult for me to stop at twelve. But twelve sermons is enough, because I want to make sure that I give a balanced menu to everybody.

What we have here is on the one hand we have the sovereignty of God, as contrasted to the responsibility, or the accountability of man. God intends that they be in balance with one another. Understanding each is necessary for the child of God to make his way on this

pilgrimage. I am going to leave the balance aspect. I want to get back to the main part of the message here, but I think that is important.

I will read II Chronicles 20: 3-6—this took place during the life of Jehoshaphat. He was a fine king overall, but he was being attacked by the children of Moab and the children of Ammon, and others as well who were confederate with them. Jehoshaphat feared for the safety of the nation.

II Chronicles 20: 3-6 And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, And said, O LORD God of our fathers, are not you God in heaven? and rule not you over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in your hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand you?

Now, is God really ruling His creation? That is the issue. I have to ask this because God's sovereignty over His creation is something that we very strongly tend to take for granted. But at the same time I find that there is a weakness in very many of us—we fail to think His sovereignty through, in terms of practical application to our own individual situation. In so doing, we greatly discount His personal involvement in our lives and His willingness to intervene for those who live by faith. The reason, brethren, is because we are very largely living by sight. I hope that that does not offend you.

Jeremiah had some very interesting experiences in being God's prophet at the time that Judah was collapsing. In Jeremiah 16: 17, God says to Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 16:17 For my eyes are upon all their ways.

Let me change the emphasis.

Jeremiah 16:17 For my eyes are upon ALL their ways. [Meaning Judah's.]

If we can stretch our minds a little bit, it certainly indicates that the nation was coming apart at the seams and God was watching every aspect of it from on high. Now it does not take much of a leap of understanding in my mind to understand that when God said "all" in this case, He was talking not only about every aspect of the culture of Judah, but about the individual as well. Now, He is omnipotent and omniscient, He is omnipresent over His creation.

This great God knows even when a sparrow falls, and if you understand what Jesus said, it does not fall unless He gives it permission to fall. If He is giving permission for sparrows to die—deciding whether they will live or die, what pray tell is His appearance in terms of your life?

Are you worth more than a sparrow? Is He watching over your life, or not?

Does His omniscience reach to you, or do you limit Him because you say in your mind that He could not possibly be interested in what you are doing? Are we living by faith, or by sight? Is something out of balance here, brethren? Are we translating the sovereignty of God into our own personal situation? Is He aware of your situation, or not?

Jeremiah 16:17 For my eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from my eyes.

He is omniscient and He is omnipresent, and there is a whole Psalm (Psalm 139) to assure us that there is no place that anybody can go in God's great creation that He will not be aware of what is going on, not only on the outside, but right in our heart of hearts as well. Are we dealing with a great God or what? His sovereignty is the issue of the whole Bible. Mr. Armstrong used to say that nobody will be in God's kingdom unless he is ruled by God. That is the issue. We cannot let God rule in our lives unless we know Him, and John 17 says that eternal life is to know God.

We will have no idea what His image is like unless we know Him and can copy it—voluntarily yield to it. The Creator and Ruler of this universe is directly and personally involved in the lives of His people, and He will not merely respond to those who trust Him. He creates circumstances and events to make things happen. Unfortunately brethren (maybe I should not even use that word) we just happen to live in a period of time and in a culture in which materialistic science and atheistic philosophy has seemingly ushered God right out of His creation, like teaching us that everything is regulated by "impersonal laws."

Brethren, there are impersonal laws, but all impersonal laws can do is react. God creates. Now that is either true, or we can throw what Jehoshaphat said right out of the Bible. If that is what we have to do, then what portion of the Bible can we even accept and use? It cannot be trusted if any portion of it is wrong. Then the rest is not worth following, because it might be wrong too.

Now science and philosophy have relegated God to being nothing more than a distant spectator of what is going on, and what He is seen as is someone who cannot even seemingly stop men from getting involved in dreadful wars, because He has endowed man with free moral agency and He is therefore obliged to give man freedom of own choice, and do this without any interference at all; but somehow if He did interfere, man's moral responsibility would be destroyed. That is the concept.

That is NOT true!

God is interfering and intervening and making things happen all the time! I will show you some scriptures in just a bit and tell you a place that you are familiar with, very familiar with, where this concept of God has been put right into the family. It shows up in the way parents are rearing their children, or I should say, letting them grow up, because rather than rearing their children; rather than being in charge of their children; rather than guiding and directing their children and interfering in their children's lives; they give their children so much free moral agency, the kids are running the family.

That is an abomination! This is what has happened in man's relationship with God. People think that God would be unfair if He intervened in our lives and made things happen. Well, I will tell you, God is deeply involved and He is making things happen. Yes, He reacts. Parents ought to be planning for their children's future, and forcefully, in a sense, guiding and directing their children in that way because they have studied their children and have seen their proclivities, their gifts they have been given and are leading and guiding those kids in that direction.

You let a kid go on his own (the Bible says that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child) and foolishness will beget a fool. Parents ought to be strongly and firmly guiding their children's lives. I will give you an illustration toward the end of the sermon that I will think you will find quite interesting.

We are just going to string some scriptures together, and I will not be expounding them a great deal because they are pretty much clear. Okay now. I mentioned that God is making things happen.

Joshua 23:10 One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fights for you, as he has promised you.

Now is that just a nice little thing, or is it practically and literally true? Does God involve Himself in the battle of His children personally? I choose to believe what it says here.

I Chronicles 5:22 For there fell down many slain, because the war was of God.

He made the war happen?"the goodness and the severity of God." He made it happen. It did not just happen because He was sitting up on His throne twiddling His thumb. He made it happen. He produced the war. Are you aware that nothing takes place in this universe without God's permission? If God permits, then it must be God's will. He is passed on it. "I want them to go to war."

II Chronicles 24:24 For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the LORD delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash.

God made sure that Judah did not win.

II Chronicles 11:1-4 And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam. But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in

Judah and Benjamin, saying, Thus says the LORD, You shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: for this thing is done of me.

God drove Israel and Judah apart. He was not passively sitting there. He drove them apart. Okay now. We could go on and on with this throughout the Bible. Again I want to say here that this does not mean that God is personally involved in every war that takes place, except to pass on it (He permits it) and therefore it is His will. But He may not personally take any interest in it any further than it is.

These things are in the Book to help us understand that God is personally involved in what is going on. He is not a distant spectator, and the thing for you and me to translate into our life, is that He is personally interested, concerned, and literally involved in your life. It is not just the big things of the nation, but your life. We have to get that, or God will not be a viable part of our lives, because we will keep Him out of it by living by sight. Unfortunately this has affected us a very great deal. So often we live life as though God is just a spectator and as though He is not really a part of what is going on.

Do you know what sin we are guilty of then? Of irreverence—the lack of the fear of God. It is the failure to ascribe the glory due to His majesty, wisdom, loving concern, and His power. I want you to look in Psalm 78 to a couple of verses there, because Israel did the same thing. All these things are in there for our admonition.

Psalm 78:40-41 How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.

The word "provoke" means to "rebel against." "How often did they rebel against Him in the wilderness?" Then the result of that was that they limited God. This word "limited" comes from a root-word that means "a mark." In practical application it means "a boundary." Are you beginning to see what mister and misses Israel did? Because they were living by sight, because they were not close to God (they did not have a good relationship with God), as they were going through the experiences of their life—they limited God.

See, they put a boundary on God, and they virtually said to God, "This far, and no farther." Now they did not actually hog-tie Him so that He was unable to do anything, but that was the practical result of their relationship with Him. It means, in practical fact, that because of their lack of faith, their lack of the fear of God, it led to a failure to make practical use of God's sovereignty over His creation and His willingness to help His people. They mentally drew lines and concluded that God would not, or could not, provide for them in their circumstance.

Thus they chose to arrive at their own solutions, and that resulted in death. "We will defend ourselves." "Can God set a table in the wilderness?" Hebrews 4:1-2 indicates that what killed them (if I can put it that way) was their lack of faith. They limited God. Now Jesus made a statement in Luke 6:46 that should mean much to us. He says:

Luke 6:46 And why call you me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

I feel that if there is any lesson that we must learn out of all of life, it is that God is God. He means what He says, and virtually everything in life on this earth is under the sway of Satan and working through the carnal-minded men who are at enmity against God, is designed to influence our thinking that man is supreme, and all the while giving lip service to God. You see, if we really thought that God is sovereign, that God is supreme, we would not merely give Him lip service, we would also submit to Him.

Now what happens whenever the will of man comes against the will of God? What happens when the will of those put a limit on God? What happens when our *will* comes into conflict with the will of God? Does man have knowledge? Does man have will? Does Man have power? Again, God gives us simple illustrations so that we can translate this concept into our lives. When there is a conflict between man's will and God's will, what happens?

When men decided that they were going to build the tower of Babel? that was their will being expressed. God says, "*Oh, no.*" So He had a simple way of destroying their will. He confounded their language. They had to leave off the building because they could not agree with one another. They could not even understand one another. That was simple. What about Pharaoh? What happened there whenever Pharaoh decided, "*Oh, no. You are not going to leave. You are not going to go out there and worship your God and sacrifice to Him out there.*"

Who won? In order to "break" Pharaoh's will God had to destroy the whole nation. Remember that concept, because it has a lot to do with us. How about Balaam, when it was his will to curse Israel? He did not get to do it. Even *he* had to admit that God would not let him do it. So he could not curse Israel.

How about the Canaanites, when they tried to keep Israel out of the land? They did not do it.

How about a little one? How about whenever Saul threw his javelin at David, intending to stick him right through with that big javelin and kill him? Do you think it was any accident that he missed? Somebody was directing that javelin so that it stuck in the wall, instead of David. It was important enough to God, and it was an important enough event that He recorded it in His word. Saul's will was to kill David. God said, "*Oh no. I have plans for David that I do not have for you.*" Saul missed.

How about Jonah when he refused to go to Nineveh? He went anyway.

How about Nebuchadnezzar when he chose to exert his will by killing Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego? He did not get to do it, did he? God intervened.

How about Herod and Jesus? He did not get to do that either.

How about Paul when the Jews conspired against him and were going to kill him in Damascus? God found a way to get rid of them, get them out of the city.

Proverbs 19:21 There are many devices in a man's heart: nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

If it is not God's will, it will not happen. I do not care what it is. I do not care how many people line up against God. I do not care how many people line up against you. If God has decreed that you not die until certain things are accomplished in your life, you will not die.

Nobody can take your life, because God's will is not done yet for you. It is that simple. I am not saying that it might not be scary, but you see, that is bringing the sovereignty of God down into personal, private circumstances—things that others might not even be aware of. Brethren, this is the very essence of faith. If we are ever going to live by faith, it is going to be because we understand this, and we believe it and we are practicing it.

There is God's sovereignty. There is human responsibility. Both of them have to work together. If we do not respond to God's sovereignty, then what? Does God have any alternatives? Oh yes, He does. Believe me brethren, we may just invite the severity of God into our lives, because He will bend our knees, if it is the last thing He does, because it is His will to save you. Why make it hard on ourselves. That is the issue. That is not hard to figure out. There are many plans in a man's heart. Nevertheless, the counsel of the LORD—that will stand.

Sometimes we pray, or we think about it, that God gives us every breath of air we breathe. You know, that is true. That is such a little thing. This whole universe is held up by the word of His power. He means it, and you are part of this universe—a very important part of this universe to Him. You are the apple of His eye.

How personally involved is God in the things that He has planned for the end-time? I have been in the church 36 or 37 years, and for some reason or another these things are just really beginning to impact on my mind. I wonder, "Where in the world have I been all these years?" But look at this with me in Revelation 17. That is why I say I feel that I have grown more in the past four months than the whole other 36 years combined, at least in this area.

Revelation 17:16 And the ten horns which you saw upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, [we know who the whore is] and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.

This is very descriptive language of what the beast is going to do to the false prophet.

Revelation 17:17 For God has put in their hearts to fulfill his will.

He did not leave this to Satan. He is doing it Himself. It is God who is working out the formation of the beast. It is He who is choosing who is going to be the false prophet. He is the one who is choosing who is going to be the beast. He is the one who is giving these men the desire, the thoughts to conspire together to put together what we know as "the beast."

It would never happen unless God's will was that it occur. Of course He is using Satan. Satan is just a dupe in His hands. But God is working out a great and awesome plan. "the severity of God." Oh, yes. God has everything figured out, and you figure into that figuring.

The hard part of this is not just understanding the concepts. The hard part is making it practically usable in our lives—being willing to live by faith. God is doing this to bring His own prophecies to pass. If God promised something, He had better have the power to bring it to pass, or He is not God. If anybody can stop Him from putting these thoughts into these peoples' minds—then they are god, and not God. Now how does God work this out? He tells us in His word how He does these things.

Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying.

Is that not simple? He is doing the same thing to these people who are forming the beast. And of course they conspire together. Now on the surface, to them it looks like, "*Hey, this is our idea,*" and "*This is a good idea*"—not realizing that God is the one who is putting the thoughts into their minds to do these things. God is the one who is clearing the way so that these sovereign nations will give up their sovereignty for a short period of time to one man—the beast. Now there are scriptures all over the Bible. You can write down Isaiah 45:13.

Ezra 1:5-6 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

Do you see that? God stirred up their spirit, to give to the project. I will make this real practical. Somehow or another brethren, we have got to get the idea that if God, influenced solely by His own thinking, has decided that He wants us in His kingdom, He is going to move heaven and earth to bring that to pass. Now I just told you what the basis of grace is—God influenced by His own thinking. Not our works. Nothing we have done. God has said, "I want you." The reason He wants us is contained in Himself. So He acts on it. That is what grace is. So He extends to us that offer. Now, who can resist His will? He has plans for you.

To change the emphasis in a verse that you know very well—Jesus said in John 14, "I go and prepare a place for you." Not generally. Individually. He is preparing a place for us in His kingdom—a place where we will fit in His government, in His Family—after He has prepared us to fit it. Now if He sets His eye on something, He is going to work to accomplish that. When we come back into the picture in our responsibility part, (and it is so often out of our fear of sacrifice, our fear of what it might cost us), we make every excuse to avoid submitting to Him.

We say, "Well, He really does not mean me," or "It will not matter this time," or "Who am I?" or "That only applies to the ministry," "I am too weak." Is God really sovereign in our life, when He is promised us that He will never give us a temptation, a trial that is too great? You see, He

has ways of smashing through our justifications and He will get us to that place if He has to take us through the Tribulation and deal out pain to the extreme to get us there. You think God will not follow His own advice, that "foolishness is bound up in a child,"—His own children? "The rod of correction (the rod of pain) will drive it far from them." He means what He says.

This leads to two questions, which I will answer quickly because of the time.

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

Here is one question. If God has foreordained that we should be in His kingdom, and is not willing that any should perish, and has thus called us and has led us to repentance and given us His spirit, what good is it? Why should we be careful to maintain good works, as Paul writes in Titus 3:8, or to exercise ourselves unto godliness, as Paul also said in I Timothy 4:7? In other words, if it is God's will to get us there, why should we care about following what He says? Why should we try so hard to be obedient?

I will tell you the answer to that at that one and the same time so simple; it is one of those things. And yet on the other hand it is profound in its ramifications. Do you know what the answer is? Why should we be concerned? Because it is God's will! It is that simple. If God has said He wants us to do it, that ought to be enough for those to whom God is supreme. That is not all there is to it, but that is the answer.

There is no place in the Bible where the Bible encourages us to fatalistic indifference to the circumstances of our life. Everywhere we turn in the Book, we are especially urged not to be content with our present spiritual, moral and ethical state. Always He urges us to go on to perfection—to reach for that golden ring, that brass ring. It is His will that we do that. Very good fruit is produced from this. So we are everywhere urged to energetically proceed to solve problems God's way.

There is a second one. That is, if again, God has ordained that we do these things, why is it so hard? Why is it so hard to overcome our sin, when it is God's will? Why does He not give us more "juice" to do it, since He is the one who gives the power? Well again, there is a very simple answer to this, and once we understand it, once I say it, you are going to recognize it.

Once you recognize it, then there is the responsibility to carry through on it. Some of you have already been doing it. We are going to read II Corinthians 12:9-10 and II Corinthians 13:4. This is when Paul appealed to God three times for healing for the "thorn" in his flesh. God said "No."

II Corinthians 12:9-10 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

II Corinthians 13:4 For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

Now what is the answer to this "Why is it so hard??" The reason is that because in God's economy there is something that we must come to—every single one of us, if we are going to grow and overcome. The understanding of it begins when we reflect back upon where we were spiritually, morally, ethically, when God began to reveal Himself to us. It says in Romans 2: 4 that "The goodness of God leads us to repentance." God leads us to repentance.

Now what happened at your initial conversion? Why did you repent? You and I repented because God led us to the place where we saw we had no alternative. We were utterly powerless to overcome sin and death; especially death. And so, when the only alternative was offered to us, we took it because we were powerless to go in any other direction.

We cannot give life to ourselves, we cannot forgive ourselves. The only thing is to acknowledge to God, consciously with all of our hearts—He is the only one who has the power through the blood of Jesus Christ to give us forgiveness, who has the power to give us His spirit, who has the power to overcome death, who has the power to give us eternal life.

That same principle is at work in overcoming as well. We will not overcome until we recognize only before Him our powerlessness to overcome anything. Brethren, God can read the heart. He reads the mind. He knows what we are really telling Him from the very depths and sincerity of our heart that we repent, that we are not holding back on Him. When we come to Him that way, He forgives and He gives us the power to overcome that sin, and it is overcome. And we know we did not do it. As long as we think that we have something to do with having the power to overcome that sin, we have not reached that place yet where He is going to feed us with the power to do it, because we are holding out on Him.

That is a deep, shaking concept, but it is so important and it has its root in the sovereignty of God. Everything in this universe flows from Him, and He wants us to let Him rule us. That is why we have free moral agency—to choose to do that. He is patient—very patient. But He is also working to bring us to this place where we actually will do it. Does Mr. Armstrong's word mean something now? "Not until God is sure that He rules us." Think about it, brethren. This has been the issue since Satan, with the issue in the garden of Eden—the tree of life, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

*"Make your choice Adam and Eve. Go ahead and do it. Either allow Me to rule..."*

They made the wrong choice, and mankind has been doing it ever since. It is still the issue. Now maybe John 15: 5 will mean something. Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing." He means it. Just as surely as a branch cannot grow on a tree unless it is attached to the trunk and the root, ... neither can we grow in God's way until we fully are able to submit ourselves to God. God will accept us as we go along and keep on working, because growth is not something that takes place over night. That is why He gives us so long to be able to learn this.

There is the sovereignty of God on one hand (and you can mark down in your notes Ephesians

1: 5, 11 where it says that He has predestined us to be in His kingdom), but there is human responsibility on the other. I want to close with these scriptures in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:1-4 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

So we find our responsibility stated very simply here, that we must become as a little child—trusting, innocent, open, wide-eyed, teachable and pliable, not competing for position, or thinking or acting as if we are the end of all knowledge on a given subject—things that we have the proclivity to do through human nature.

I heard a story from John Reid about a German girl that he heard being interviewed a number of years ago on radio. Unfortunately, I do not think Germany reflects the same values anymore, as this little story tells. This young lady was really talented, very accomplished. She played the violin well, she spoke four languages. Besides that she had a number of accomplishments.

The interviewer asked why she put forth so much effort to accomplish this, and she was still trying to do more. Her answer was quite simple and right to the point..."Because my father told me." "Yes," he said, "but you are 21 now." The implication was "Break loose girl and live a little bit. Take control of your life." She replied, "In America you have something we do not have in Germany." "What?" said the interviewer. "Teenagers," she said. "In Germany we are children until we leave home."

I think that pretty much catches the essence of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. God is our Father. He is sovereign. He is never wrong in what He wills for our lives. We are His family, and it is our responsibility to be a child, and yield.