

Sovereignty, Election, And Grace (Part One)

God's Sovereignty Extends to All Areas of Life

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Given 20-Apr-02; Sermon #554

Following the rather heavy and sometimes discouraging series of sermons I have been giving on pride, and how deeply it has insinuated itself into our character—and from there, dominating many of our judgments—I thought it would be good to look into a more hopeful and encouraging subject. This may not start out appearing to be encouraging, but this is going to be a brief series, and there is a lot of ground-laying to be done in this sermon. So hang on until we get through the second sermon, and I think you will find it quite challenging and effective in helping us to be encouraged. Turn now to Galatians 1.

Galatians 1:3-7 Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him who called you into the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you, and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Because *this world* (as both Paul and John term it, meaning the seemingly *ordered* systems, but at the same time *evil cultural* systems one finds scattered all over this planet) is so dynamic, so permanent and solid-appearing, we are led to misunderstand a vital aspect of our relationship with God. We do not stand alone in this misunderstanding. The overwhelming percentage of the Western, Christian world we live in also fails to grasp an element of our calling and our life in Christ that is important to the well-being of our faith in God, and our position in relation to Him and to other men.

There are compelling reasons why this that we are going to go into is so easily misunderstood. One of the more important reasons is that "this present

evil world" was created by and through human nature, and apart from God. We all know this, but our attention is drawn to it like a moth is to light. However, by the will of God, we have to continue to live and work surrounded by it even after we are called, so there is no escape from its demanding allurements. These allurements are detrimental to the direction that we must go with our life.

On the surface of this age, men with names, power, and reputation appear to be originating and directing everything to produce events that cause us to react, to act, to make choices, to do or not to do, to believe, and to have opinions. Overall this world has a very wearying and depressing effect on those whose minds are elsewhere because they are seeking the Kingdom of God.

Because of these realities, it is essential that we be reminded in a variety of ways and times that the unseen and great God is still *actively* ruling His creation. The emphasis is on the word "actively," because it is so easy for us, like the world, to assume that He is passively watching what is going on.

Because of God's calling and because of what is in the Bible, we have come to accept another reality, and that is that a very intelligent, gifted, powerful, but perverted spirit being named Satan is the ruler of this world. He is the king of all of the children of pride. It is the spirit of *his* mind that produces all of these distracting, alluring, and yet wearying realities that we have to deal with.

Satan is not omniscient. He is rooted in one place at one time. But nonetheless, because he is a spirit being, he is constantly influencing people to proceed in the direction *he* envisions will bring about his anti-Creator plans. In addition to this, he has a horde of demons who are subservient to him. Because of this collection of himself and others, and man's willingness to accept direction from Satan to be influenced by him, virtually all of mankind is in agreement with him. But then, over and above Satan is the Great God who is the Creator to whom even Satan is subject, and whose plans and purposes rule, and *will* be accomplished.

This governing principle—this concept—is in itself not our problem. We are already familiar with hierarchies of power and authority in the visible *human*

realities. We can easily see in our human societies that they are arranged with divisions of power and authority. There are leaders over precincts, wards, and boroughs. Over them are city council members. Over them are mayors and state representatives. Over them are senators and governors. Finally, at the very top of the heap are the federal officials.

Where does that leave us personally and individually? Are any of us involved in those things? No, but we are subject to them. From every outward appearance we are helpless, we are caught and lost, and totally ineffective in the rush of the events that are swirling around us. Life and all of its events proceed, and we are carried along in their forceful current whether we like it or not. We have no influence with these men in the seats of power, and neither can we influence the direction of *when* things happen.

Now where is God in all of this? Is this great God dealing with us, or are we every bit, or even more so, just as lost in the shuffle in relation to God as we are in our relationship with those in seats of authority in this world? Is it like we are caught in a vise between the all-powerful God and the horde of demons on the one side (the spirit world), and on the other side the world of men and all the cultural systems that are working on this earth? *Do we really see God?*

I have been wrestling with this subject since I got an idea from a sermon given by Garner Ted Armstrong at a Feast of Tabernacles many years ago. I have even lost in my memory when it was. I know that it was sometime back in the seventies. It is from that sermon I got the concept of what became the sermon "Do You See God?" It was still quite a number of years before the sermon "Do You See God?" ever came to pass, and from that sermon came the "Sovereignty of God" series. Now this is another sermon in that series, and it touches on overlooked aspects of God's grace.

The point of this message is to show in many ways, and from a wide variety of places in the Bible, how God is both taking the initiative in the millennia-spanning swirl of the huge events that we are caught up in, as well as in our personal salvation and our life as well. Brethren, it is His intent to save us. His activity, His personal involvement, includes both the *big* things (as we

might measure them) of this world's history, and the *small* things that are actually part of this world's history, but we do not see that in light of our own tiny little insignificant lives, as we might judge them.

We are dealing with two concepts virtually all the time since we have been called. One of these is that we know God **is** the Sovereign Ruler over His vast creation, and so we tend to easily grasp God's involvement in what we might consider to be big things involving important historical figures like Nebuchadnezzar, or Jacob, or David. But what about you, and what about me?

Our knowledge of the very vastness and complexity of the creation actually tends to work against us regarding this other concept. This other concept is He is not only aware of us, but has been for a long time, and is working in our lives *every moment of every day*. Swallow that one for a while. I will give you proof as we go along.

Psalm 10:4 The wicked his proud countenance, does not seek God;
God is in none of his thoughts.

God is not in all of the thoughts of the wicked. Let us go now to Psalm 73. Another man wrote Psalm 73, but he agrees with David.

Psalm 73:11 And they [the wicked] say, "How does God know?"
And is there knowledge of the Most High [of them and what is going on in their lives]?"

Believing God's literal, personal intervention and involvement in the lives of the called is one of *the* major differences between the converted and the unconverted. The unconverted hardly ever even stop to think about God, let alone His being involved. David made the contrast there in Psalm 10 to show you the way he was. He was in effect saying, "God is in *all* of my thoughts! I think of Him all the time. Everything that I think about is bounced against what I know about God, and judged, and passed on. I consider what God thinks about anything."

That is the way the converted ought to be, but the unconverted just do not do that, even though they may think about God, and even though they may be religious people. They do not process God and His ways and His standards through their minds in the same way that the converted do. We see an extreme here in Psalm 73 where the unconverted (the wicked) say, "I can do what I want. God's not watching me anyway."

Because we do not tend to consider ourselves as worthy of His notice, and because we tend to feel ourselves as being insignificant to Him and the operations of His awesome plan, we are sometimes led not to see Him personally and individually paying attention to us, even though we may think about Him a lot, and so a dichotomy actually takes place in our minds. Even though we think about Him a lot we probably do not feel worthy of His attention. Because our awareness of this reality that God is involved, and because our awareness of this reality is not anywhere near as intense as it should be, the result is that He does not have the impact on us in our thinking and decision-making anywhere near as much as is needed. Therefore our relationship with Him tends to be distant and vague, rather than acute and focused.

Let us go to Ephesians 2. This sermon fits into this broad question.

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 anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Let us ask a simple question. Are we saved by grace, or by works? God's sovereignty must be considered in answering this question because the Bible makes it very clear that His sovereignty is not just over the big historical and miraculous events, but also over our lives regarding salvation. Paul is very clear in one regard. We *are* saved by grace. But then he removes some of the clarity somewhat by saying that faith (meaning *our* faith) plays a part in this salvation. And then he reorders the picture once again by saying that even *this faith* is a gift from God. He also makes it very clear that our salvation is *not* by works, but that works are nonetheless absolutely required because

God has ordained that we should walk in them. Therefore they are required, but they do not save us.

This issue has divided human thinking ever since knowledge of the possibility of salvation has been made known to men. I can tell you right up front here that we are not going to come to any exact division of responsibility regarding faith and works, or grace and works, in this sermon either. But one thing is true, and that is that grace and works are both involved in salvation. Another thing is clear, and that is that God's part (the grace part) is so much larger than our part there is no comparison, even though the works are required. This is shown by the fact that even the faith we operate on is given by God. Even though the works are essential, they are almost invisible in terms of salvation when viewed honestly against God's grace in terms of their importance.

Consider this very statement in Ephesians 2, that when combined with the understanding we must live by faith, and then are informed that even this faith is God's gift, what is there left for us to do except to respond by using the very gifts He has given so that we can do what He wants us to do. We are going to find as we go along that it is not only faith that God gives us.

Since our calling we are, on the one hand, dealing with our responsibility before God and men, and on the other hand, God's sovereignty. I think that we can safely say that God does as much as He possibly can for us without leaving us totally out of having some small part in the salvation process.

Let us begin to put some things together here. We are going to go to II Corinthians 5 and look at the concluding statement, a summary of what has preceded it.

II Corinthians 5:17-21 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is [to this end], that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading

through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The Bible clearly states that we, once we are converted, are a *new* creation. Let us ask a dumb question. Brethren, did we create ourselves? Who did this creating? This is where sovereignty is coming into the picture here concerning grace. Consider the first phrase of verse 18 in light of "a new creation": "And all things are of God."

Salvation is a creative process, and it takes time and experience. It takes testing and labors. That phrase says "ALL things (pertaining to this new creation Paul writes about here) are of **God**." He then proceeds to address the subject of reconciliation of us through Him. The major thing in Paul's mind regarding the statement "all things," is all things pertaining to reconciliation. In verse 21, Paul says, "For He [that *He* has to be God the Father] has made Him [that *Him* has to be Jesus Christ, because He is the means of reconciliation] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

God *made* Christ to be sin. That is a creative act. God made Christ to be sin, and His purpose for doing this is that we might be *made* (another creative term) the righteousness of God. These two words translated "made" indicate creative activity by God in order to accomplish this.

I want to remind you before we go any further that the process is only beginning in terms of this sermon, and already we have discovered that we are saved by grace, and that this is through faith, and the faith has been a gift of God. Now we have backtracked just a little bit, and we find that the forgiveness that enables us to have access to God, and justification for God, was also something that was created by God by means of the perfect life and then sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Are you with me on this? Who is the dynamic operative in all of this? It is God. We are going to find as we go along that it is His grace, as shown by His creative activities, that enables us to be saved, and that the creative activity in His grace *never* stops. It goes through the entire process from beginning to end, and we are only at the beginning.

Let us go to a very famous verse in John 3.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

We all understand that Nicodemus came to see Jesus and inquired as to what in the world was going on here. Jesus gave him what appears on the surface to be a cryptic response. We understand that Nicodemus really did not get it. He looked at it with a literalism that Christ did not intend. My research resources tell me that this statement, "You must be born again" may also be rightly translated "born from above." "You must be born again," or "You must be born from above."

Did you ever hear of any human being impregnating his own mother's womb in order that he might be born? That is an impossibility to this point, and this is why Nicodemus did not get it because he looked at it entirely literally. Jesus' response is indicating the repetition of an act (a birth) from a different source other than what happened originally.

Jesus' response is showing something miraculous from God. Here we have God showing that again He is taking the initiative to get things started, to keep things rolling. God is clearly (by Jesus' statement) shown taking the initiative for the elect's salvation, because this spiritual birth "from above" is something that they cannot do for themselves. It is yet another gift from God in their behalf.

In order for this to occur, did God have to be aware of them before He did it? Of course. What you are seeing here is yet another act of sovereignty on God's part. He is exercising His power, His authority, to bring certain things to pass in the lives of the called in order that they will be in His Kingdom. The called do not take the initiative. The called only respond. I can tell you confidentially that very frequently when we take the initiative we get things all messed up.

What is essential for us to understand in relation to grace is that God is the Creator. It is that simple. He is the Creator of what we are involved in, and His personal involvement in the entire salvation process and the building of character is very, very deep.

Now here is a true statement. I found this in an old Protestant commentary. I emphasize "old" because I think that in an overall sense they have lost sight of what I am about to quote. The man wrote, "All of life is for the building of character." Consider this in the light of the three sets of verses we have already used.

Ephesians 2:8-10 clearly says we are saved by grace through faith, and that even that faith is God's gift to us. II Corinthians 5:17-21 says we are a new creation and that God gives all things concerning reconciliation. John 3:3 states we must be born from above (from heaven), and that too is an act we are totally unable to accomplish. God must accomplish this for us also.

Who does the creating of this character that the man in the quote referred to? Our first thought might be, "We do, by our works." We have often been told (and I have said it myself), "We've got to build character." But this response—"We do"—is only partly right. We do play a part, and the part that we play is very big and very pressured for us. It is designed to be this way so that always we are being manipulated into situations that push us into what we feel are circumstances and pressures beyond our limit. We moan and groan, and say, "Oh! I can't do it. It's too much. I can't resist. I can't go forward. God, you're just going to have to do it for me." That is not quite right. Brethren, *God* is the Creator.

I want you to think of a manufactured item. I do not care whether it is a telephone, or an automobile, or a piece of jewelry, or a wristwatch. Think of anything that is manufactured. Does the item you are thinking of manufacture itself? Neither do we. God is *our* manufacturer. He is the potter. We are the clay being shaped. Does the clay shape itself? We know better. If it is just left alone on the spindle where it is spinning around, what does it become? Does it become a beautiful piece of porcelain that is shaped into something delicate and curvaceous? Not at all. It is just a blob! Well, we would be like the former if our creation is left to ourselves.

It takes a Creator with a wonderful and vivid imagination and with just the right kind of touch, and with the vision that moves Him in a certain direction to bring each piece that He creates to the form and the delicacy and the beauty that *He* wants. He knows where He is going. We do not. We only know generally. God is the Creator.

A most beautiful element to this amazing process is that God is able to work all things without ever enslaving us to fate. The things that occur in our lives always leave room for us to shoulder our responsibilities and to make judgments and choices. Brethren, even though we do not play a great part in this, our responsibilities *cannot* be avoided. They are a reality, and we have to deal with them.

I John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us not, because it did not know Him.

Where did that love come from? That love comes from God. God is not in their thoughts. He is in our thoughts, and this gives us tremendous advantage concerning our responsibilities.

I John 3:2-3 Beloved, now are we children of God; and it has not been revealed what we shall be [We do not know exactly where we are headed.], but we know that when He shall revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him like He is. And every one who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Our responsibilities, though huge to us, are small in the overall picture. Those responsibilities that do fall our way are things that we have to carry out. We will do it faithfully if we understand, if we catch the vision. We are responders within the creation process, and our responses play a small part in what He creates. We, at best, only see in part. As Paul put it, "We look through a glass darkly." This is one reason why faith is necessary.

This analogy I am describing breaks down somewhat because, unlike some manufactured things, we are living beings, and we have minds, and we can refuse to respond for a wide variety of reasons that we will not go into at this

time. Or, we can choose to cooperate, but to a lesser degree than God might be pleased with. Jesus said that some grow thirty percent, some grow sixty percent, and some grow a hundred percent, or a hundred times. We have to respond, but not everybody responds to the same degree.

Here is another question we have to consider. What is character? We are in this process in which character is being built. What *is* character? What do we mean by this term? Unfortunately many of us unthinkingly put it into a far too narrow definition, thinking of it only in terms of morality. This undoubtedly is a necessary part, but it is most assuredly *not* a complete definition. This is one of the reasons why we say in the Church of the Great God that God is preparing us for His Kingdom. His preparations of us include far more than morality.

If you look in a dictionary you will find that "character" is a collective term. My dictionary says: "It is the qualities, especially mental and moral, that distinguish a person or thing." Character is like a sign that says such and such and so and so. Character can also be considered as being like a sack, a bag, with a large number of items contained within it. I said it is a collective term.

As important as morality is, character includes far more than that, even as maturity includes far more than merely aging. There might be some people who are 72 years old, but are still kids. You see what I mean. Character includes qualities and values like love, faith, hope, wisdom, comprehension, patience, endurance, persistence, vision, zeal, humility, meekness, mercy, sympathy, kindness, humor, and forgiveness, all wrapped up in one human being. God has to prepare us in every one of these categories, and more besides, and all can be considered within the term "character."

Here the sermon takes a turn in order to provide some more scriptural foundation for what I have been saying up to this time. God is involved in all of the processes that are taking place on earth, both historically and individually. All are in some form an act of His grace, the results of which we may not see until finally the second resurrection or the third resurrection is over.

Some of the verses that we are going to get to here are rather mind-bending and awesome to consider. We are going to go to the book of Lamentations. I want to go there just to get off and running, because it was here that I got my start, really, on this subject once the "Do You See God?" sermon was part of my mind.

It was during the preparation for a Bible study on Lamentations (which I believe was in either 1993 or 1994) that I was motivated to begin to see a few possibilities of this subject. I had read these scriptures before in Lamentations 2:1-8 a number of times, but for some reason, as I was making that Bible study, my mind locked in on the fact of God's direct personal involvement in these events being described here in Lamentations to a degree that I had never experienced before.

What I began to see was that He was not merely involved, which was something I took for granted, but that He had directly undertaken to *cause* this to happen to Jerusalem, and to Judah. What this in turn led me to do was to begin to consciously look for more evidences of His direct involvement in the affairs taking place on earth. I began to find them all over the place, and sometimes—it looked to me, anyway—with startling ramifications.

Lamentations 2:1 How has the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and did not remember His footstool in the day of His anger.

That first phrase is a metaphor that says, "God in His anger rendered Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, Zion unable to see." Is that not what a fog does to somebody? That is what a cloud is. That is what fog is. It is just a cloud, and when you get inside of one everything becomes disorienting, depending of course on how thick the cloud is.

Lamentations 2:2 The Lord has swallowed up and has not pitied all the dwelling places of Jacob. He has thrown down in his wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought them down to the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.

Are these just fancy words, or is what God is saying here absolutely true that **He** did this? He not only blinded them, but He made their armies weak and impotent. All the defenses they put up crumbled before the Babylonians.

Lamentations 2:3-5 He has cut off in fierce anger every horn [a symbol of strength] of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy [His right hand being a symbol of protection that He was keeping the enemy away, but He drew it back and the enemy began flooding in]. He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devours all round. Standing like an enemy, He has bent His bow [You bend your bow to shoot arrows in order to kill.]; with His right hand, like an adversary, He has slain all that were pleasing [giving certainly the impression that He made sure those that were considered to be icons—the idols that the others followed—got killed] to His eye; on the tent of the daughter of Zion; He has poured out His fury like fire. The Lord was like an enemy. He has swallowed up Israel. He has swallowed all her palaces.

Evelyn has just been reading recently about some of these things concerning the very thing we are reading of here, how that Nebuchadnezzar's army came into Jerusalem. They not only burned down the Temple, they burned down the king's palace. They burned down all of the houses. They destroyed the city completely. That is in Jeremiah.

Lamentations 2:6 He has done violence to His tabernacle as if it were of a garden; He has destroyed His place of assembly; the LORD has caused the solemn feasts and Sabbaths to be [not just *not kept*, but] forgotten in Zion. In His burning indignation He has spurned the king and the priest.

Zedekiah was captured and taken in chains to Babylon, and his eyes were put out. But his eyes were not put out until he watched all of his sons being put to death. Of course "the priest" here is probably a reference to the high priest.

Lamentations 2:7-8 The Lord has spurned His altar, He has abandoned His sanctuary; He has given up the walls of her palaces

into the hand of the enemy. They have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as on the day of a set feast. The LORD has purposed to destroy the wall [all the protection] of the daughter of Zion. He has stretched out a line; He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying; therefore He caused the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together.

These are sobering things, and we are given to understand, when we comprehend the whole of the context that is here, that this is not something that would just have naturally occurred, but God directly initiated it so that He made *sure* it would happen. He became the force that raised up Nebuchadnezzar, and *made* the Babylonians strong, and made them go in the direction that they came with their armies, sweeping everything before it, so that they came into the capital city of His people.

The important thing for this sermon is God initiating from His sovereign height that these things occur. He is directing everything to ensure that they occurred, and that they occurred in exactly the degree, in the manner that He had planned in advance, including who was to get what in terms of His wrath. God is *actively* ruling His creation. He is not passively watching what is going on. In His forbearance He waits to see if those prophets He sends are going to effectively get the message across. Even if they have been effective, nonetheless these things may come to pass because the people hardheadedly resist His appeals.

In Lamentations 3 is a statement that has far-reaching ramifications that we may get to in my next sermon.

Lamentations 3:37-38 Who is he who speaks and it comes to pass, when the Lord has not commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed?

That is not a very good translation. Let me read those verses from a modern translation. "Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?"

God is ruling. The implication of this is that if somebody says something and indeed it does come to pass, God has been the One who put those words in

that person's mouth! "Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things occur?"

We are going to go back to a string of verses, and to one in Isaiah that you are familiar with. This is fairly straight forward.

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light, and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity.

I have given that verse a modern spin. The King James says, "I form the light, and create darkness, I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things."

God gives both the good and the bad. He is in control. He is ruling sovereignly over His creation, and He wants us to understand this and to make it a part of our lives, and to think of everything that is going on in the light of what God has said in His Word.

Here comes a very interesting one in Isaiah 63:

Isaiah 63:17 O LORD, why have You made us stray from Your ways, and hardened our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, the tribes of Your inheritance.

Let us change two words there. "Lord, why have You **caused** us to go astray? " That is not something that we normally think of God as doing. This is not something I think He would do in regard to His faithful people. You have to remember that Isaiah was speaking in relation to Israel—to these unconverted people. I read a scripture in Matthew 13:15, and in the context of that parable it is very clear that God *gave* blindness to the people. God *hardened* Pharaoh's heart. This is in the same general position.

I will tell you why He would do it. It is because He was working some purpose, and bringing these people along a bad path (an evil path) because He was going to teach them something. Maybe they would go to the grave having gone this way, and when they come up in the second resurrection He

is going to bring it back to their mind what they did. Then they will realize that they should never have gone that way, that they should have made other choices. They are going to see the hardness of their heart that allowed this to occur.

Let us go to Isaiah 64 because the same context is going right through it.

Isaiah 64:7 And there is no one who calls upon Your name, who stirs himself to take hold of You [It is no wonder God was causing them to err]; for You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities.

We do not like to think of God doing those things, but He does. He hid His face from them. I am not going to try to con you into thinking that I understand all the ramifications and all of the causes and all of the results and so forth of why He did this. I do want all of us to understand that He is capable of doing these things, and there are historical examples right in His own Word that He did it, and we need to take them into consideration in our thinking.

Isaiah 64:8 But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and we all are the work of Your hand.

This is a confirmation on Isaiah's part, that though he did not understand it fully, he nonetheless believed in God's love and His mercy and kindness, and that God is the Potter and that really everything is going to work out good in the end. But for the time being, God has hidden Himself. You can be sure that this is a creative act on His part when He did it. We are to understand this principle, that when He does hide His face, it is actually an act of grace.

Now, I want to ask you a question. The church is going through a terrible time. Ever since Herbert Armstrong's death in 1986—and even before that; we can look back now and understand that the church was disintegrating even before he died—how many people have been led astray, have gone off the path? How many people have been blinded and have been walking about in a *fog* as far as what is going on, blaming everybody but God, when in reality it looks very much like He was the initiator of what happened?

In the long run, in the end, what He has done (in hiding His face from the church of God), we will thank Him—for His correction, for His active grace in waking us up and making us turn our attention to what really matters in life. I think that you will find what I said here is going to be true, and that this destruction of the Worldwide Church of God is an act of grace, because had things continued as they were, maybe all of us would have gone down with the ship.

Let us go to Job 22, and we will end on this because it looks like a pretty good place to stop.

Job 22:1-2 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said: "Can a man be profitable to God, though he who is wise may be profitable to himself?"

That kind of introduces the subject. Of course Eliphaz is aiming his scornful response right at Job, and so he opens with what is probably the most scathing argument against Job's argument that appears in the book.

Job 22:12-13 "Is not God in the height of heaven? And see the highest stars, how lofty they are! And you say, 'What does God know? [Does that not sound like the description of the man we saw there in Psalm 73:11? Eliphaz was taking Job to the mat, you might say, accusing Job of something he was not really guilty of. But at least Eliphaz understood a principle here.] Can he judge through the deep darkness?'"

His reference here is really a striking testimony of God's supremacy over us. God is above all, and God is judging all, and God is *moving* what is happening on this earth. He is judging, as it were, through the cloud.

Some of the testimonies we have seen just so far should humble us who should be able to *see* God. It should humble our mind and hearts, knowing that these things are not unconcerned expressions. They are put there by God so that we will grasp what He is doing and not lose hope, not lose faith, but know that He is ever working in our behalf.

Everything He does is an act of love and an act of grace. We need to keep the faith and be patient as He responds to our prayers and gives us the leadership and the guidance we need through these things. It does not suit us at all as His children to think that He is not involved and initiating the things that are going on. We ought to be pleading with Him for a revelation of His will so that we might understand.

Up to this point the verses that I have given you are broad statements tending to cover what we would normally consider to be God-affecting large scale operations, even moving whole nations about, and kings and individuals of great power. When we begin the next sermon we are going to begin looking at verses directly aimed at what we might consider to be small, personal, individual things that God addresses. I think that you are going to find them, in some cases, exciting and mind-bending. I kid you not. I mean mind-bending in terms of the ramifications that might come to your life as a result.