

The Sovereignty of God and the Free Grace of God

E. G. Cook

Former Pastor - Philadelphia Baptist Church

Birmingham, Alabama

(Now In Glory)

Sometime ago, I read an editorial titled *The Sovereignty of God and His Free Grace*. It reminded me so much of my beliefs on this subject in times past. I do not recall any time in my life when I denied God's sovereignty and election. I would always say, sure - I believe in God's sovereignty and in election. But for many years I would always end up with man being the boss and doing the electing just as in this editorial.

In the first part of this editorial it says the doctrine of divine sovereignty is taught in the Scriptures. He quotes **Psalms 103:9** to substantiate the statement, and then, just as I did for so long, it goes to great length to prove that this verse does not really mean what it says. I am sure the writer had no desire nor any intention whatever to prove any Scripture untrue. But, until the Holy Spirit of God opens the eyes of a saint as to this precious doctrine he, like the writer of the editorial, and I did for so long, can only end up with man running the show. I call this doctrine precious because it is so precious to a blood-bought saint of God when he can really and truly see that **“all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he (God) doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou” (Daniel 4:35)?** It is so comforting to know that our destiny is in the mighty hands of a sovereign God from the eternity of the past throughout the eternity of the future.

I make no profession of being smart. I know full well that what I do not know about the precious Bible would fill a library full of books. But I should like to express some of the precious truths God has so graciously revealed unto me.

The editorial tells us that Jesus was rejected by people for whom He offered salvation. It gives us **John 1:11-12** to back up its statement, but if you notice it stopped with verse **12**. I once had to do the same thing because verse **13** just would not fit in with my theology. If you look closely you will see verse **13** puts our salvation wholly, completely, and altogether in the hands of God, and leaves out the will of the flesh and the will of man altogether. No wonder the writer had to stop with verse **12**. Maybe it is because of my lack of Bible knowledge, but I do not see our Lord offering salvation to anyone here in verse **11**. Our Authorized

Version says, **“He came unto his own, and his own received him not,”** but I believe that if you study this verse closely in the original you will see that He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not, or did not welcome Him. We see here the fulfillment of **Psalms 69:8** where He says, **“I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children.”** He came back to the home in which He had been reared, but His own half brothers, James, Joses, Simon and Jude refused to welcome Him. **“For neither did his brethren (brothers in the original) believe in him” (John 7:5).**

The editorial goes on to ask “were the ‘sheep’ only the ‘elect’? If so, why did not the sheep accept Him?” Here again may be due to my lack of knowledge, but I have no idea where he could have possibly come up with the idea that the sheep did not accept Him. It certainly did not from **John 10:27**, for there the Lord of glory says, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”** Our Lord told those old religious Pharisees that the reason they did not believe on Him was that they were not of His sheep (**John 10:26**). In other words He is telling them that if they were His sheep they would believe on Him. The editorial says the “Hardshells” teach the sheep only are the elect. You know, I find it possible to go along in perfect harmony with the Hardshells, and many other groups to a point. In **II Thessalonians 2:13** the “Hardshells” and I can walk hand in hand as we read, **“God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.”** We are in perfect harmony to that point, but there they must stop or else wreck their whole theology. Read and believe the rest of the verse which says, **“Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”** The holiness people and I are in strict accord in saying that God demands sinless perfection. Most certainly He will never settle for anything less than sinless perfection. There they stop, but I dare not stop for I know that I am not, and that I never will be sinless in this life. Therefore, I must flee to Him who is sinless, even to Jesus Christ the righteous.

The editorial goes next to **Acts 7:51** to show us that people do resist the Holy Spirit. To be sure, the religionists in Old Testament times, and the religionists to whom Stephen was talking had resisted, and were still resisting the Holy Spirit. And the religionists are still resisting the Holy Spirit today. In His parable beginning with **Matthew 21:30** our Lord shows these people how they did the resisting before His day, and how they were to do it in His day. They had beaten, stoned and killed the prophets. Now they were planning to kill the Heir and this they did on Calvary’s cross. They were resisting in the same sense we would resist an invading army. Should Russia send an army against us we would resist it because we do not like their way of life. That is exactly the reason these religionists resist the Holy Spirit. They do not like the “way of life” the Holy Spirit

sets forth. In all fairness to the Scriptures, dear reader, do you see anything connected with **Acts 7:51** that would in any way indicate that the Holy Spirit was making any personal appeal to those old Pharisees. Is that why they are resisting Him?

We have a clear cut illustration of all this in the case of Saul of Tarsus. As he walked along that road on that memorable day, he hated the very ground our Lord had walked upon. He hated the very ground His saints were walking on. His burning desire, his great ambition was to utterly destroy our Lord's people from off the face of the earth. He was resisting the Holy Spirit to the extent of his ability. Not only had he been one of those who heard the gospel at the mouth of Stephen, he was just as guilty of Stephen's death as if he had actually cast the stones. In **Acts 9:1** we see him **"breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord."** This word **"breathing"** is from the Greek word **EMPNEO** which literally means "breathing on." It seems that his hatred for the Lord's people was so intense that he was literally breathing this hatred in and out of his nostrils rather than the air around him. But please note what took place when it became a personal matter with him. Let me say here that true Christianity is not a religion as is Shintoism, Catholicism, Protestantism and the rest of the isms. It is a revelation of Jesus Christ. So when Christ was revealed to this Christ-hating and saint-hating Saul of Tarsus we hear him as he says in his great amazement **"Who art thou, Lord"** (**Acts 9:5**)? But when it was revealed to him who Christ was he forgot his great hatred for our Lord and for His people and said, **"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do"** (**Acts 9:6**)? Who would dare say that Saul of Tarsus was seeking salvation? Who would dare doubt that it is God who chose the person and the time in this case? He was not saved against his will, but he sure had to be given the will, or the desire for it (**Philippians 2:13**).

It is amazing to see what we come up with when we start reading between the lines in the Scriptures. The writer of this editorial came up with the idea that those who **"draw back"** in **Hebrews 10:39** are under the convicting power of the Spirit. Just what lines he read between I am unable to see. Did John not see these same people in **I John 2:19**? He does not say they are struggling with the Holy Spirit. He says, **"They went out from us, but they were not of us."** The devil's crowd will always slip in among the saints, but when the going gets rough they **"draw back,"** or **"go out from us."** I can see absolutely nothing to even intimate any conviction of the Holy Spirit on the part of those who **"draw back."**

Then when this editorial comes to **Matthew 11:20**, you get the idea it really enjoys reading between the lines. It seems that sometimes we make repentance

synonymous with salvation. Repentance is not salvation by any stretch of the imagination. The word “**repentance**” comes from **METANOEO** which means “to change the mind.” A man may start out drinking, fully believing that it is nobody’s business but his. After a time he may sober up enough to notice that his wife and children are ragged, hungry and friendless. As a result, he may change his mind about it being no one else’s business. When he changes his mind about the matter, he has really repented, but his changing his mind about his drinking does not save him by any means. I have a hard time seeing any personal salvation involved in the salvation of the city of Nineveh at the preaching of Jonah. Jonah told those people that in forty days the city would be destroyed. The king told his people to turn from their evil ways. They did, and the city was spared. But our new birth is not brought about by our turning from our evil ways.

The editorial then asks, “If God has beforehand determined who shall be saved and when, why would a preacher ask his congregation to “make a decision for Christ?” The only reason I can see for a preacher to ask for such a decision under any condition is that he may add more and more names to the church roll. Decisions are the product of the human mind. No working of the Holy Spirit is essential to these decisions which are filling Baptist churches to overflowing with unsaved members. When a church has begged for decisions for a time she finds that she must bring the things of the world into the church in order to keep her unsaved members happy and their pocketbooks open. The result is that the Lord of glory is crowded out of His own church by these unsaved church members and their worldly interests such as banquets, social, athletic programs, substitutes for Bible teaching such as literature, etc. We hear our Lord as He says, “**Behold I stand at the door and knock**” (**Revelation 3:20**). You can have all your decisions with all their results for “**With the heart man believeth unto righteousness**” (**Romans 10:10**), and that only after sanctification of the Spirit has taken place (**II Thessalonians 2:13**).

When we come to **II Corinthians 5:14-15** in this editorial we see further evidence of reading between the lines. It says this text affirms that Christ died for “every person.” I am ready to admit that on the surface his logic sounds good, but if we are to teach our fellow saints God’s precious Word, we must go deeper than the surface. I am, by no means, boasting of my ability to go deep in the Scriptures. I am just stating a hard, cold fact. May we go to **Revelation 19:17-18** for a little word study. We need to really study basic words in Scripture before we start giving them a definition. If we do not do that we find ourselves way out on a limb. I have been there and it is not very comfortable place to be. In verse **17** of **Revelation 19** John sees an angel standing in the sun inviting all the fowls to the great supper of

God. Then in verse **18** the angel says, “**That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great**” (emph. EGC). This great supper takes place after the battle of Armageddon when the bodies of this great army of two hundred million men (**Revelation 9:16**) have been crushed on the mountains of Israel (**Ezekiel 39:4**) by the hundred pound hailstones (**Revelation 16:21**) and their blood has run to the horse bridles for 176 miles (**Revelation 14:20**). Now please note that the angel invites the fowls here to eat the flesh of “**all men.**” Then go to **Ezekiel 39:12** where you see that it will take the Jews seven months to bury what is left of the huge army after the fowls of the air and the beasts of the fields are through with it. It is self-evident that the “**all men**” in **Revelation 19:18** did not include the Jews. Then in **Zechariah 14:16** we see those who were left among the nations. Many other Scriptures show clearly that the fowls were not to eat the flesh of every man. On the surface we have a contradiction which forces us to go deeper into the study of this little word “**all.**” It comes from the Greek word **PAS** which has many different shades of meaning. In some cases it does mean everyone. In others it means every kind, or every variety. In still other cases it means the whole of one object, or the whole of one group. So it is certainly grammatically correct to say that He died for the whole group of His chosen ones. For “**He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us into the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will**” (**Ephesians 1:4-5**). I believe every word of that.

Now let us go back to the editorial’s first point of discussion where it says, “there were those who were bought by the sovereign Lord who denied Him and who were destroyed.” He gives us **II Peter 2:1** to back up this statement. It is really amazing sometimes to see what a weakling we unintentionally try to make of our precious Lord. A Baptist church here in our city had a missionary to Mexico as their guest speaker, or should I say their guest slide projector operator? When one of the men of that church was called upon to pray, he rose to his feet and begged God to bless what the Lord was “trying to do” in Mexico. This was an insult to Him who does as He wills “**in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth**” (**Daniel 4:35**). We have dethroned God and enthroned man to such an extent that many of us are left with a very puny weakling for a God. And He does not like it. My Lord has never tried to use finite creatures only.

But now let us get back to the editorial’s Scripture reference, **II Peter 2:1**. Here we read, “**But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall**

be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” First, who were the people whom the false prophets and false teachers were, and are among? Certainly everyone who will say they are among our Lord’s people. It is the saints these false teachers want to lead astray. Others are already astray. So let us keep that in mind as we study this Scripture. In translating from one language to another, sentence structure is often hard, for the translator does the very best he can possibly do, but the expression can still be misleading if we are not very careful. To illustrate, let us look at an expression on **II Corinthians 5:21**, “**For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.**”

Now if we follow the editorial’s line of reasoning in **II Peter 2:1** here in **II Corinthians 5:21** we will find ourselves saying it is the “**us**” “**who knew no sin.**” But since that is such an obvious error we know we must let the word “**him**” be the antecedent of the phrase “**who knew no sin**” for He is the only one who knew no sin. Now if we follow this same procedure in **II Peter 2:1** we will have no difficulty in seeing that these false teachers are denying the Lord that bought His people. Most certainly they are denying the Lord that bought us. They deny His virgin birth, they deny His substitutionary suffering, His blood atonement, His bodily resurrection and ascension, His mediatorial work and His bodily return to this earth. If the Lord of glory bought these instruments of hell, did He not make a very poor investment? I am greatly indebted to my former pastor, Brother E. D. Strickland for his invaluable assistance on this particular Scripture.

The editorial goes on to say, “The blood atonement is sufficient for all of Adam’s fallen race” and gives **1 John 2:2** to substantiate his statement. I hope no one will get the idea that I question the sufficiency of the blood atonement. It is sufficient for anything and everything that He our Lord wanted it to be sufficient for. Some of these millionaires in our country could supplement my social security if they chose to do so. Certainly their funds are sufficient, but that is not what they made their money for. For a long time I hung my theology on this verse along with **John 3:16**. On the surface they seem to be impregnable. In fact, **John. 3:16** is usually the last stronghold of those who are unable to see God’s sovereignty and election. Let us examine **I John. 2:2** and see what it was that I jumped over for so long. We read, “**He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.**” Just what does it mean to be “**the propitiation for our sins**”? The word “**propitiation**” is from the Greek word **HILASMOS** and W. E. Vine says it signifies a means whereby sin is covered and remitted. Not only does this propitiation mean that our sins are covered, it means that our sins “**are covered,**” it means they are remitted. This word “**remit**” is from **APHIEM** which

means “to send away.” So our sins are covered and sent away. Please note that the same thing is done for the sins of the whole world here in this verse as is done for our sins. That means that the sins of this particular “**whole world**” are covered and sent away. Now if the whole world here in this verse means all of Adam’s fallen race as this editorial claims, then old Satan and his angels will have to make the best of it in Hell by themselves, or else there will be people in Hell whose sins were covered and sent away.

Maybe a little word study on the word “**world**” would throw some light on this bewildering subject. The word comes from **KOSMOS** which has a primary meaning of order, arrangement, ornament, or adornment. So in the original Greek the word has several different meanings. But, that we may refrain from being dogmatic about this word meaning all of Adam’s race in these two references, let us get our own English dictionary and check on the meaning of the word. After all, is that not where we always go for word meaning? Even the children’s school dictionary will give you something like a dozen different meanings of this word. The large, two volume New Century Dictionary gives some nineteen different shades of meaning. It means any indefinitely great expanse, such as a world of water. Then it means a particular class of mankind with common interests. It is therefore not only permissible but also grammatically correct to say the “elect world.” In the same way we can say the “non-elect world” because they are all interested in the things of this world, therefore they are a particular class of mankind with common interests. We are told that “**No prophecy, is of any private interpretation**” (**II Peter 1:20**). So if we study **John 3:16** in the light of **Ephesians 1:4, John 1:13, Psalms 5:5, Hosea 9:15** and **Romans 9:11-13** we will have a real hard time seeing other than the elect world in it.

Now that we have seen the many varied meanings of the world in both the Greek and English dictionaries, let us look at its usage in our Bible. In **Luke 2:1**, “**There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.**” Could this world include the American Indians, the Japanese and the Chinese? Certainly not. In the first place he did not know all these people existed, and if he had known it, he had no authority to tax them. So it could only mean the Roman Empire. In **John 4:42**, “**This is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.**” While the word world can be correctly spelled only one way, it has many meanings. And while the word saviour has two correct spellings, it has only one meaning. It means “one who saves,” and that is it. Now when this verse says “**The Saviour of the world,**” does it mean that He is the One who saves all the millions who were already in Hell at the time and all the millions who are still going there? In **John 17:9**, “**I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given**

me.” Certainly the world here does not include those whom the Father had given Him. **II Peter 2:5** we see “**the world of the ungodly**” which certainly did not include Noah and his family. And then **I John 5:19**, “**We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.**” Please note, this “**whole world**” did not include the “we.” Many others could be given, but these should prove to any open mind that the word “**world**” has many different meanings. In the light of all this, how could you expect a court of justice to agree with you that the world in **John 3:16** and **I John 2:2** means all of Adam’s race? Are we not all guilty too many times of trying to fence God in? I am sure that if we had been living in the time of Jacob and Esau, we would have been prone to tell God that it would be wrong for Him to hate Esau. We would, no doubt, have told Him that He should love poor old Esau just as much as He did that scheming and conniving Jacob. When will we ever get around to seeing that God’s thoughts and ways are not ours (**Isaiah 55:8**)?

I have come to the point that I no longer desire to see everybody saved. I want to hear my Lord say to that host of workers for salvation in **Matthew 7:23**, “**Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.**” I want the second beast of **Revelation 13** to call down fire from Heaven and deceive those whose names are not written in the book of Lamb’s Book of Life. I want some of the tribulation saints to be beheaded because of their faithfulness to their Lord. I want to see the beast and the false prophet cast into Hell alive. No doubt many of you are calling me an old reprobate by now. If you are, I plead guilty. I am just an old reprobate sinner saved by the marvelous grace of God. I have just one reason for desiring to see all these terrible things done, and that is that God’s precious Word says they will be done. I want to see His Word stand forever (**Isaiah 40:8**). If His Word fail, your salvation and mine would not be worth a two-cent piece with a hole in it. If the post-millennial Baptist could succeed in winning everyone to Christ they would wreck the universe. God’s Word would have to be broken for them to succeed, and we learn from **Hebrews 1:3** that He upholds “**all things by the word of his power,**” or the power of His Word. So, if His Word could be broken, the whole universe would go into oblivion.

If, as this editorial states, salvation is offered to everyone, what is to hinder the beast and the false prophet from accepting it? If they accept it, what kind of predicament would that leave our Lord in? **Revelation 19:20**? For many years I got around the question by saying God knows who will be saved and who would not. I still believe that He knows all that, and more. In fact, I believe it today, not only because of His omniscience, but because He knows that no man can come to Christ until He draws him to Christ (**John 6:44**). I once thought He gave

everybody a little yank or a gentle tug. But I have come to see that this word “draw” in **John 6:44** literally means to drag. The word comes from **HELKO** which means to draw, drag something to a specific point, or place. It is clearly illustrated in **John 21:11** where this word is used. Here we see Peter as he draws the net of fish to the place he wanted them. Then in verse **6** we see the same word used. In a negative sense. Here these disciples could pull and tug at this net but they could not draw (**HELKO**) it to the place they wanted it. In verse **8** the disciples are drawing, or rather dragging the net, but not to a definite place. So a different word (**SURO**) is used. Therefore, if we are to give the word **HELKO** its correct meaning in **John 6:44**, we must say that the Father draws those whom He gives to Christ where He wants them.

Quite recently I heard an evangelist in his desperation tell the lost in the congregation that God has done all He can do, now it's up to you. If he had said I have done all I can do, now it's up to the Lord, I am sure the Lord would have been better pleased with him. Let us all resolve that in our thinking, and in our teaching, we will put God back on His throne where He belongs. If He could save Saul of Tarsus and E. G. Cook, He can save anybody He wants to save.