

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

by Donald Grey Barnhouse

A few years ago a group of Evangelical ministers in the suburbs of Philadelphia asked if I would hold a series of meetings, and I gladly accepted. While we were making the arrangements one of the young ministers said, "I may not be present one or two of the evenings. We are having a new baby at our house, and I may be busy." The other fellows joked him a bit, as men will in such cases, and he smiled and said, "You know, we have been married ten years, and this is our first child. A couple of years ago we adopted two children, and they are so bright that I am afraid that when we have our own, and someone asks which is ours, I shall have to say 'the stupid one!'" There was laughter, and the incident passed off.

A few weeks later we were in the midst of these meetings, and near the close of my address I saw this young minister come in and slip into a seat at the rear. After I had greeted people at the close, I saw him making a signal for me to join him in the pastor's study. I went in and said, "Well, is it a boy or girl?" and I saw right away that I had put my question in the midst of tragedy. I shall never forget the look on that young minister's face. He said, "Doctor, God has given me a son, and I love that child, but he is a Mongoloid idiot." I said at once, "Bob, listen to me. God has highly honoured you by allowing you to be in the ranks of those who suffer greatly; but you must know from the very outset of this which is going to colour your life, and that of your home, that God planned it." I opened the Scripture and read a verse to him, and as I read I added a phrase to cover his situation. It is the verse which God spoke to Moses when Moses was complaining that he could not speak. I do not know what type of speech defect Moses had, but when he said to God, "I am of a slow speech and a slow tongue" the Hebrew word there is the same as that used for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Moses evidently had some impediment in his speech: and God said to him, "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh a man dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind?—and I added 'a

Mongoloid child'—have not I the Lord?" (Exod. 4:11). He grasped the Bible and said, "I never saw that before. But I believe it, I believe it." I said, "Bob, this is one of the greatest truths in the Scripture. No person in this world was ever blind that God had not planned for him to be blind; no person was ever deaf in this world that God had not planned for that person to be deaf. God said, Who made man's mouth, who maketh the dumb, or the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? If you do not believe that, you have a strange God who has a universe which has gone out of gear and He cannot control it."

My God knows how many rain drops are going to fall on this world in this year. My God knows how many leaves are going to be on the trees of all the forests of this world. My God loves me so much that the very hairs of my head are numbered. A child once said to its mother, "Do you know how many hairs are on my head?" "No, my child." "Then you do not love me as much as God does," and the mother said, "No, my child, I do not." It is well to remember that the hairs of our head are numbered, whether we have a full head or a bald head.

There is a great truth here. If you do not understand these things you will think God has let things get out of hand, and the devil is doing something outside God's power. But that is not true. H. G. Wells once said, "Either God has the power and does not care, or cares and does not have the power." But that is not true. There is the third alternative. God cares; God could have stopped the war and the bombing if He had wished. God could destroy Satan today if He wished. If you do not believe that, you have not an omnipotent God. I believe that it is of the very foundation of our Christian Faith that we should know what kind of a God we are dealing with.

Did God create all things? Has God all power? Has God all knowledge? Did God create Lucifer; and did He know he was going to become Satan? Could He have made him otherwise if He had wished? Certainly, you say. You do not understand; neither do I. If I could understand I would be as God, and there would be no need for faith. Faith is to believe what you do not understand: that is the essence of faith and love.

A story was told in one of our magazines by a marriage

counselor. A young woman went to a marriage counselor in Boston and said, "I am afraid my marriage is going to break up. I am sure my husband is lying to me. He tells me he is working overtime; but I have been past the building where his office is, and there is no light. I have telephoned, and there is no answer; and he does not bring home any extra money." The marriage counselor suggested that the husband should be brought in for interview. So the wife broached it to her husband, and when the whole story was told and he gave the true and right explanation, the young wife said, "How was I to know that you were working in a back room where the phone was cut off? How was I to know that you were saving the extra money to get me a fur coat for Christmas?" And he said, "That is where faith comes into love." And that is true of all our relationships.

What God said to Moses, and what I said to the young minister, was a great fact: and it is true for all of us. Our Father knows these things. He knew before Job was struck by all the disasters that came upon him; He planned every detail in Job's saga. The devil was the agent—God uses the devil. Don't be disturbed when you read that there was come an evil spirit from the Lord; no evil spirit ever did anything that God had not planned for him to do. That is terrible for some people who look at things superficially; but if you do not believe it, if you think the devil is out of hand, and God is biting His fingernails and saying, "I do not know what to do about it," you are wrong. We do not have that kind of God!

Let me tell you a parable, which I wrote some years ago. A man had a beautiful estate, with magnificent trees on it. But he had a bitter enemy, who said, "I will cut down one of his trees; that will hurt him." In the dark of the night the enemy slipped over the fence and went to the most beautiful of the trees, and with saws and axes he began to work. In the first light of morning he saw in the distance two men coming over the hill on horseback, and recognized one of them as the owner of the estate. Hurriedly he pushed the wedges out and let the tree fall; but one of the branches caught him and pinned him to the ground, injuring him so badly that he died. Before he died he screeched out, "Well, I have cut down your beautiful tree," and the estate owner looked at him with pity

and said, "This is the architect I have brought with me. We had planned to build a house, and it was necessary to cut down one tree to make room for the house; and it is the one you have been working on all night." Do not forget that anything the devil is working at, he is but cutting down a tree God had planned to cut down; he never did anything outside the overall plan of God, for God is omnipotent and omniscient and victorious.

Now the heart of the story as we go through the whole of the Scriptures is this, that we are in the midst of a rebel province. The prince of this world is the devil, and he is the god of this age. We are in the midst of the rebel province, and we are God's underground movement in this world. The vast masses are with Satan; those who are truly born again and are children of God are relatively few, but they are very important in God's sight, and all history is arranged for them. God overturned the empire of Egypt for the sake of Israel, and God has tossed empires about for the sake of His people: and He always will.

The fact is that in this world there are people of every type and kind and rank; they are in the devil's camp, and God has them duplicated in His camp. If you are not in God's camp I can duplicate you, if you give me time. Say you are 40, a graduate of such and such a university, making so much money, married and with so many children, and you do not believe in God. I will find you a man of 40 who has had the same kind of education, the same kind of career, the same kind of family, the same type of background, who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. The devil has his convicts; God has His convicts. In prison there are convicts who say, "When we are released I know a place we can burgle and get enough money to start going again." But also in prison there is some man down on his knees saying, "God, you had to bring me this low and break me in order that I might find Christ and be born again, and now I am about to be released and by Thy grace I want to go forward and live for Thee." The devil has his convicts, and God has His convicts. The devil has his doctors; God has his doctors. The devil has his ministers, and God has His ministers. There are those who minister merely for the sake of their religious prestige, and preach this nebulous

doctrine of the brotherhood of men and the Fatherhood of God without the necessity of the new birth: but there are others who give themselves unreservedly to the Lord.

In the United States twelve or fifteen years ago there was a newspaper story of a well-known film actress who had a child, and told the reporters that she was going to call her daughter "Hella," because at the place she came from a girl that raised hell was called a "hella," and "When my daughter grows up I want her to raise hell."

By one of those coincidences which are more than coincidences I was preaching in a small Baptist Church there in the south-west, and sitting in the minister's house I opened a book which colleges sometimes publish with pictures of students, and there before me I saw the portrait of this actress, whom I recognized from the many pictures in the papers. I turned the pages and soon found the young minister's wife, and I said to her, "You knew so-and-so?" "Oh, yes," she said, "we were in the same class." She went on to tell how the actress had been elected Queen of West Texas, Queen of Hollywood, and had gone to New York; while the other had been a simple girl who married the young Baptist minister. They had a boy of five years old, named David. I said to him, "Your daddy's name is John, and you are David; you are not named after your daddy!" He shook his head, and his mother said, "We called him David, because David was a man after God's own heart, and we wanted our son to grow up a man after God's own heart." I could not but think of those two girls, going to school together, and one of them saying, "I want my daughter to be named Hella and to raise hell," and the other wanting her son named David because she wanted him to be a man after God's own heart.

Hebrews 11:7 tells us that when Noah built the ark and entered the ark he condemned the world. "Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world." No man living in Noah's time could say, "how was I to know there was to be a flood," because God could say, "Noah did not know, but he believed" and he condemned the unbeliever. The honest Christian doctor condemns the dishonest doctor; the believing Member of

Parliament condemns the non-Christian Member of Parliament; the Christian truly born again minister condemns the ethical leader who is not born again. No matter what the status of an individual, the balance is there.

Within the last year I have seen one of the most remarkable conversions I have ever experienced in all my ministry. It was last September that an industrial magnate in my church came to me and said, "We have a young man in our organization about whom I am concerned; he seems to be on the point of breaking up. I have asked if he will have a talk with you. He is coming to church on Sunday. Will you have dinner with us and afterwards talk to him?" And it was so arranged. When I got the young man alone I said, "You have some trouble, I understand; but first of all, have you been born again?" "Oh," he said, "You don't understand; this morning's is the first church service I have ever attended in my life. I have been inside a church once for a funeral and once for a wedding. My grandfather worked with Robert Ingersoll—the great atheist, like Charles Bradlaugh in England—and gave out atheist literature. My father also was an atheist. When I was 17 years old my father died. There were no prayers or religious service, and at the cemetery they put the body in the grave, and a lawyer opened a paper and said, 'In the handwriting of the deceased I have the following statement which I am commanded by his last will and testament to read at his graveside.' The statement was as follows: 'I wish to testify that I have lived my life without religion and without any superstitious belief in any God or devil, and I wish it known that I have died as any animal, for we are all part of the evolutionary process, and when death comes we die like any other animal. It is in this belief that I have lived and died.' The others walked away and I was left standing there alone."

I began to speak with him, and told him first of God. I reasoned with him from the Scriptures, and I could see that his mind was dark, but also that he was in tremendous confusion. About three weeks later my friend told me that this young man had been going to a psychiatrist every day, but he was afraid he was heading toward a breakdown, and would I see him again. I agreed; and he came to me again, and we had another talk. He said, "I do not know what to do. I go to the

psychiatrist, and he talks about what happened in my childhood.” I said to him, “Man, it is what happened when you were seventeen that matters. Don’t you realize that what you have to do is to say, ‘Oh, God, I take sides with Thee against my father.’” He almost leapt out of his chair and said, “Do you realize what you are asking me to do? You are asking me to say my father is in hell.” And I said, “If he is, it will not help the situation you are in. You must take sides with God against your father and say, “God, my father deserved to go to hell, and I deserve to go to hell.’ “I wrote out on a piece of paper, “Oh, God, if there be any God, I will vow before Thee, that if Thou dost show me that Jesus Christ is Thy Son, I will believe in Him and take sides with Thee against my father.” And I put it in his hand, and he fell on his knees sobbing, and said, “I don’t have to say ‘If there is any God,’ I know there is a God.” In December I baptized him and his wife and children, and received them all into the Church; and he is going on steadily.

Let me tell you this, there is no atheist in this world who can stand up and say, “I was brought up in a background of unbelief” and not be condemned. Here was a man brought up in about as atheistic a background as it is possible to have, and he believed, and that condemns every atheist the world has ever seen.

You can carry this all through life. There is no position in which you can find any individual who is a non-Christian, who does not have his opposite number. It was very interesting to me that, when dictators ruled over two countries with great Christian traditions, Italy and Germany, with Musolini and Hitler, at the same time God saved Chiang Kai-shek, a heathen Chinese. There were three dictators ruling at the same time: God had the one, and not the other two. They died; and Chiang Kai-shek lives on with simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to see the tremendous importance of this: for you are living in a world where somebody is exactly like you and is not a Christian, and the way you live enters into their condemnation.

Someone says, Do you mean that God would allow a young minister to have an idiot child? Yes, He would. Do you think God would make someone be blind? Well, the Lord Jesus was

asked by His disciples, "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" and the Lord Jesus said, "Neither: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." Do you mean, you say, that God Almighty let a man be blind for thirty or forty years so that Jesus could perform a miracle on him? Certainly. Do you not believe in the sovereignty of the general staff of the army? Our joint armies, American and British, were all waiting in England in 1944 for D-Day. At that time by common consent one man had been chosen to say "This is the day," and Eisenhower was in supreme and sovereign command. Nobody questioned his right to say, "This company shall go there and land under the emplacement and die." "This one shall go there and do this." We recognize the right of a commanding general to say to one man, "Take this map and find this bridge; take a parachute, fly over, drop down over the bridge and destroy it, and we will give your widow the Victoria Cross," and to another, "That lorry over there is bogged down in the mud; go and blister your hands and get it out." If a general may do this, please allow God Almighty to do what He wills. He knows what He is doing. He has a vital plan for all that is going on, and we are part of it, although we do not know why. There were many men in the army who did not know where they were going; whether they would be sent to Norway, Greece, or anywhere else. They recognized the right of their officers to send them where they would. Shall we not recognize the right of God to be sovereign?

When a man doubts the sovereignty of God he shows himself to be Adam more than at any other time. He is saying, "God, I do not want you to run things; I want to run them." But when a man says, "Yes, Lord, You can do with me what You please; You created me," he accepts the sovereignty of God. If you are blonde, God created you and He planned it; if you are a brunette, if you have a heavy head of hair, or a bald head, He planned it: the very hairs of your head are numbered. Our God is sovereign, our God is eternal, our God knows what He is doing; and you and I are in His plan. The tremendously important thing is for a man to say, "I am a Cockney Costermonger; I have my little place in the market, and there I shall live for Jesus Christ." Another man says, "I

have a brain and ability and I have been elected a Member of Parliament, and I have to go to the House of Commons for Jesus Christ." Another man says, "All I have ability for is to be a curate in a tiny village; but I am here for Jesus Christ." Another says, "You have made me a parish priest," another is in a place of honour and authority.

When God says, "The last shall be first, and the first shall be last," He is not referring to the place where we work. God has a fifty gallon can, a twenty-five gallon can, and many quarts and pints cans, and gills; and that represents the human race. We have a few fifty gallon ones, the great men; but He has many of the small ones—and do not think that if you are a fifty gallon one, you will necessarily have No.1 place in heaven. A pint which is 100 per cent yielded to God will have a better place in heaven than the fifty gallon who is 90 per cent yielded to God: and that is why the cook may have a higher place in heaven than the lady she cooked for! The last shall be first and the first shall be last; and what we must know is that we are in the will of God in the place where God has decided that we should be.

We understand this when we know that nothing can touch the child of God unless God has planned it. If we do not see or understand, why that makes no difference; we may still say to the Father, "Lord, whatever pleases Thee, I will do." Many of us can say, "I thank God that my lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; I thank God I am in good health." But if God sends me sickness, shall I repine?

Several years ago, the first time I was in India, I visited one of the most beautiful mission stations in the world, and I met there Amy Wilson Carmichael, that woman of charm, delicacy and taste. Before I entered her room, her friend said, "Be very careful not to shake her hand too hard; she is so tied up with arthritis that it gives her pain if people grip her hand." There she was, just a year or two before her Home going; I put out my hand and she laid hers in mine, and held it for a moment. We talked of the things of the Lord, and she spoke about something of mine she had read. Then I told her how we prayed that she might have a renewal of strength and vigour. She said, "I get many letters, and I can stand them all except those that say 'We are so sorry that God has laid you aside.'"

Suppose a man had been a submarine captain and all of a sudden was transferred to the front-line trenches, would he consider himself aside? He would be transferred to another front; and what has happened to me is that I have been transferred from the front of active missionary work, to the front of active pain.” And believe me, dear friends, when the Christian goes from one to the other, he is not laid aside; he has been transferred by the Captain and put in the place where the fighting is the strongest and the heat is the heaviest. What is required of us is that we be so yielded to God that we can understand the nature of the place where He has put us, the nature of the assets He has put at our disposal; and that we should say to Him, “Lord, I would be faithful as I am, where I am, for Thee.”

I will close with a story which will perhaps illustrate this a little more fully. When I was a young pastor a woman stopped me one evening and asked me to speak to her son, but I was not to tell him she had asked me. He was dying of tuberculosis, and was only 22 years of age. She said, “He curses God something terrible. Would you come and see him?” A few hours later I knocked, and she introduced me. I began to talk to him, and said, “I have been preaching next door....” He broke in and said, “Don’t talk to me; get out of here. I do not want anything to do with your God,” and he lifted himself on his elbow with such a paroxysm of anger that he began to spit blood, and fell back in exhaustion, with his last gesture cursing God. I said, “I will pray for you,” and he said, “I want none of you.” I prayed with the poor mother and went away. He died shortly afterwards, and I knew nothing of how God dealt with him.

A year passed, and on another Sunday evening a girl stopped me as I was coming away from a cinema in which I had been preaching. I had preached three or four times that day, and was tired. The girl asked if I would call on a young man in the next block. At first I said, “I am very sorry, but I cannot do any visiting to-night; I am very tired.” She said, “He is dying with tuberculosis. He is saved, and he wants to see you.” I at once thought of the other young man, and so I went over to the house. He was almost the same age as the other boy. He said to me, “You know, doctor, for the last few

months it has been possible for me only to walk for half an hour each evening. Just at sunset I would get dressed and walk down the street to the corner, and come back. About a month ago I saw the lights in the cinema. It was Sunday, and I thought the American Legion might be there; so I thought I could set for a moment and rest. They gave me a hymn sheet, and I sat down and God spoke to my heart, and that night I trusted the Lord Jesus Christ. I have told my family, and all my relatives who have visited me. Every person in this block has been to see me, and I have told them of Christ and how He saved me. If I get my uncles and cousins and all my friends here next Sunday night, would you come and tell them just what you preached when you told such-and-such a story, because I want to tell them that is what led me to Christ." And I said that I would.

The next Sunday night I went to the little home. There were people in the living room, in the bedroom, in the kitchen, and on the stairs. The young man said faintly, "I want Dr. Barnhouse to tell you what he preached the night I was saved." There to his relatives and the others I repeated what I had said that night. When I had finished, he said, "I want you all to know it will not be many days before the Lord will take me home to heaven. I know I am going soon, and I want you to know that my hope is in Christ alone." And he gave them an invitation to come to Christ.

I went out from that place and pondered over these two incidents, and little by little I began to see other parallels; and over the course of the years this has been built up, and so now I see it as God's plan for His world. This is what is happening; this is our place in the invisible war.

I have one moment more, and I want to leave with you this last incident which I think may help you. There was a young woman married to an aviator in our army, and one day a telegram came, "The War Department regrets to inform you that your husband has been killed in Korea," and she screamed out, "God can't do that to me; God can't do that to me." But God had done it. There was in my church a Trustee who had a daughter married also to a young man in Korea, and one day there came a telegram to her also, saying that her husband had been killed. The mother and the daughter were

standing together when the telegram came. When she read it the girl put her arm across her mother's shoulders and said, "Mother, would you leave me alone; I want to go to my own room, and do not disturb me." She ran upstairs, and her mother called the Trustee, who immediately left his office and hastened home. He said to his wife, "How is she?" and the mother said, "I have not disturbed her." The father went upstairs and opened her door very quietly and tiptoed in. He saw she was kneeling by her bed, with telegram spread out with the open Bible. He got beside her very quietly, and heard her say, "My Father, my Father, oh my heavenly Father," and he turned and went out and closed the door and went downstairs. He said to his wife, "She is in better hands than mine."

I am quite sure that hundreds of you can duplicate these stories in your own life, when you have come to a place where life came and struck you, and you said, "This is more than I can bear. Is this the reason why I have been created?" Perhaps I may say that by the way we live in such crises God triumphs, instead of the enemy. I love the fact that the Bible says, that "dust shall be the serpent's meat." Job gave the devil a big mouthful of dust, and I am sure that this girl gave the devil a mouthful of dust. The young minister with his idiot child gave the devil a mouthful of dust. You may be sure in all the stories I have told, it was shown that Satan's blandishments were not able to hold those who had put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may find many different psychological and social situations, and whatever happens to an unsaved family will happen sooner or later to a saved family. You may be chosen to do this, or that, or the other; but whatever it is, God has put you there as a general puts his troops in a strategic position for a great battle and a great victory.

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