

THE SOVEREIGN GOD

P.F. JENSEN

"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

Once upon a time there was a preacher who desired to be especially used by God to speak his word. Believing that his own frailty and sinfulness got in the way of the word, he decided to take the following course of action. He would prepare only half his sermon. After he had finished the prepared section he would, as he thought, depend completely on the Holy Spirit to find the words to say. Surely the spontaneous power of the Holy Spirit working through his passive mind would produce the real word of God!

For several Sundays he tried this new method, and was pleased with the result. Then one day one of his flock approached him about his preaching. She had noticed, she said, a change in his preaching about half-way through each sermon. What did it mean? Proudly he explained his new system to her. She looked at him for a moment, then said 'That is rather strange ... in that case, you are a better preacher than the Holy Spirit!'

It's a salutary tale. The woman was very perceptive, and a far better theologian than the minister. His attitude, however, is understandable. There is a feeling that everything human is so bad that God is best seen in what is the least human - in this case a mind that had gone into neutral. There is also the feeling that God lurks in the unexpected but not the ordinary. It seems more usual to find him in the miraculous rather than the everyday. His activity explains what we do not understand, but is not necessary where the explanation is obvious.

What a limited way of looking at God! Years ago scientists who were Christian used to make the same

error. Even the great Isaac Newton used to ascribe to God parts of the universe that his system did not comprehend. God thus became what someone called a 'God of the gaps', responsible for an ever-diminishing number of natural phenomena. God was chased out of his own world.

The true answer is, of course, that God is sovereign over the whole earth. What we may call natural laws are simply our descriptions of the regular way in which he upholds the world.

The same is true, too, in the Christian life. The Spirit blessed the preacher's careful preparation and presentation, because the Spirit does not need to work apart from human nature, to accomplish his ends. It is when we see the hand of God in all aspects of life, including our strongest efforts, that we will begin to grasp the power and majesty of our God.

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