

The Legacy of Sovereign Joy by John Piper, Crossway Books, Carol Stream, IL, 2000. (6 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Freeing Us from the Entanglements of This World.

Augustine's song of grace is unlike anything you will read in almost any modern book about grace. The omnipotent power of grace, for Augustine, is the power of "sovereign joy." The alone delivered him from a lifetime of bondage to sexual appetite and philosophical pride. Discovering that beneath the vaunted powers of human will is a cauldron of desire holding us captive to irrational choices opens the way to see grace as the triumph of "sovereign joy." Oh, how we need the ancient biblical insight of Augustine to free us from the pleasant slavery that foils the fulfillment of the Great Commandment and the finishing of the Great Commission. (p. 11)

2. Imitate the Faith of Those Saints Who Have Gone Before

God ordains that we gaze on His glory, dimly mirrored in the ministry of His flawed servants. He intends for us to consider their lives and peer through the imperfections of their faith and behold the beauty of their God. "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7, RSV). (p. 17)

3. Omnipotent Grace

In maturity, and to the day of his death, Augustine fought the battle for grace as a submissive captive to "sovereign joy" against his contemporary and arch-antagonist, the British monk, Pelagius. Nothing shocked Pelagius more than the stark declaration of omnipotent grace in Augustine's prayer, "Command what you wish, but give what you command." Augustine knew that his liberty from lust and his power to live for Christ and his understanding of biblical truth hung on the validity of that prayer. He was painfully aware of the hopelessness of leaning on free will as a help against lust. (p. 19)

4. God's Supreme Grace

The battle for omnipotent grace was not theoretical or academic; it was practical and pressing. At stake was holiness and heaven. Therefore, he fought with all his might for the supremacy of grace against the Pelagian exaltation of man's ultimate self-determination. (p. 20)

5. Man Is Powerless Before God

Martin Luther conceded that Erasmus, more than any other opponent, had realized that the powerlessness of man before God, not the indulgence controversy or purgatory, was the central question of the Christian faith. Luther's book *The Bondage of the Will*, published in 1525, was an answer to Erasmus' book *The Freedom of Will*. Luther regarded this one book of his—*The Bondage of Will*—as his “best theological book, and the only one in that class worthy of publication.” This is because at the heart of Luther's theology was a total dependence on the freedom of God's omnipotent grace to rescue powerless man from the bondage of the will. “Man cannot by his own power purify his heart and bring forth godly gifts, such as true repentance for sins, a true, as over against an artificial, fear of God, true faith, sincere love...” Erasmus' exaltation of man's fallen will as free to overcome its own sin and bondage was, in Luther's mind, an assault on the freedom of God's grace and therefore an attack on the very gospel itself, and ultimately on the glory of God. Thus Luther proved himself to be a faithful student of St. Augustine and St. Paul to the very end. (p. 21-22)

6. Scripture Illuminates Who God Is

The witness of God to Scripture is the immediate, unassailable, life-giving revelation to our minds of the majesty of God that is manifest in the Scriptures themselves. (p. 23)