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—
A DISCOURSE OF THE
SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

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Howard D. Williams



A

DISCOURSE

ON THE

SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD,

DELIVERED

AT

MORRIS-TOWN

JUNE 21, 1829.

BY ALBERT BARNES.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The following Discourse is printed at the request of a few friends of the author, and solely for their use. It was written during the haste of a weekly preparation for the Sabbath, and is not supposed to contain any thing new on the subject. It is regarded only as a fair statement, and an obvious demonstration, of a very plain doctrine of the Bible. The only wonder is that it should ever have been called in question or disputed—or that in a world where man's life, and peace, and hopes, all depend on the truth that GOD REIGNS, such a doctrine *should have ever needed any demonstration*

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

"He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth."—Daniel iv, 35.

It is not unfrequently the duty of ministers of religion to discuss doctrines extensively unpopular. Bound, in meeting an unyielding trust, to present the whole counsel of God, they must sometimes encounter what gathers around it, most of the opposition of the heart, and most systematic disbelief and fortified hostility.

Such is the doctrine contained in the passage of scripture which I have selected, and which I wish this morning to present to your candid consideration. For some cause, arguing, I suppose, as little in favor of the heart as the head, it has encountered no little opposition. Charity may sometimes trace that opposition to a source that must be loved. It may be, because it is pre-eminently that lofty and hallowed, and incomprehensible theme, before which the mind bows with reverence, and where trembling awe represses investigation.— It may be, because the doctrine is not properly understood; and because certain dark features are given to it in the view of the mind; piety may sometimes look upon it with suspicion, or even dare to express its disbelief of its truth. Or, growing up from a less defensible cause, opposition may owe its origin to the fact that the doctrine ever has been, and perhaps ever will be, extensively misrepresented; that it is opposed to some of the worst forms of sin; that it meets man's pride and vain glory, and haughtiness, and fancied independence; and that there is a state of soul that, in the emphatic language of Paul, is enmity against God.

Nevertheless, it is a doctrine full of consolation to the Christian. It is one of the great pillars of moral government. It is the only confidence of any stability or wisdom in the affairs of the universe. It is of special interest to young converts—the source of their gratitude, and the security of their comfort, guidance and salvation. It is of pre-eminent importance to the confident, pompous and haughty sinner—the leveller of his lofty views, the opposer of his schemes of mad ambition, and the truth, that in time or eternity, is to be laid across his path, and stay his haughty strides against God.

As well then because it is misunderstood, as because it asserts the honor of God, and approaches the humble disciple with the true source of gratitude and reliance, and the unhumiliated man with the only prospect of his salvation, it presents always an imposing claim to our attention. A candid discussion of it can never be out of place. To such a discussion I shall now invite your attention—promising further only that I shall present such arguments as lie in my path, with no reference except in the *respectful manner* of presenting them.

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to the feelings of men ; and that I invite to those arguments the closest possible scrutiny. If the proofs alleged that God is a sovereign, establish the fact, then the doctrine *must* be believed. If not, then should they be fairly refuted, by detecting their sophistry—not by indifference or prejudice, or hatred. Proofs that *may* run into, and fix one eternal doom, press heavily on the attention of men—nor will superficial reasoning, or mere feeling, disburden the conscience of responsibility to God, for the manner in which we regard him and his government.

Our plan in considering the subject, will be to explain, to prove, and to vindicate the doctrine.

The doctrine is, that God is the Sovereign of the universe—doing his pleasure in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. By this we do not mean that he disposes of his creatures without any regard to justice. It is held that on no creature has any more misery been inflicted, or will there be, than is deserved. God claims the attribute of justice, and though *at present* it is somewhat difficult to *establish* its propriety, yet it cannot be proved *not* to belong to him, till eternity is exhausted—for *in* that eternity the good, however much they suffer here, may be appropriately rewarded; and the *wicked*, however much they may triumph here, may be sufficiently punished.—Nor do we mean that men, or angels, or devils are machines. For parents control children, and monarchs control nations, and men of talents and wealth control their dependents, and still they are free;—and it does not easily appear, why God may not have as much wisdom as man; and why under *his* sovereign administration, men may not be as free, as under any other.—Nor is it held that he is unkind, or unmerciful, or unwilling to save men, or unsolicitous about their happiness. His sovereignty in the salvation of sinners, is one of the best arguments that he is *so* willing to save, as that in spite of themselves, he is determined that all shall *not* be lost. His gift of his Son to die for all, and his repeated assertions that he is willing to save *all* that come to him—even those that are bent on their own ruin, prove that his benevolence is an ocean without a shore;— though his sovereignty sits over that ocean, and presides in its rolling billows. Nor is it meant that God is arbitrary, in the popular sense of the term; that is, acting without reason. We doubt not that the infinitely wise Being has substantial reasons for what he does, and though it is a part of this doctrine that his reasons are often wholly concealed from men, yet it is held that every thing is the result of wisdom, and will bear the scrutiny of all created intelligent beings; as a parent often hides from his children the motives of his conduct, that will be understood in their maturer years; or a government *for purposes of State* conceals the reasons of its doings, till there shall be a proper time for their development.

It *is* meant on the other hand, that God does what he deems to be right, independently and irresistibly. That he is placed beyond con-

trol. That he dispenses his favors according to his own pleasure, and as HE sees on the whole to be best. That he gives no account except when and where he chooses, of the reason of his doings. That he seeks in his own way, his own glory and the good of the universe, whether it be "in the creation of an insect, or the salvation of a man."

We suppose that he does this according to a plan formed in his own mind, and therefore infinitely wise and good. We regard his dealings as not the result of chance, but suppose that he acts from design as all wise, and intelligent *creatures* do. We suppose that he *reigns* over the universe—that he is the governor of all things; that he "directs, controls, and disposes of all creatures, actions and things." And by this we mean not that he *commands* or *compels* men to be wicked, but that he controls them; that he has power to check and restrain them when he pleases; and that he makes their wrath to praise him. We suppose that he sits over human actions, and fixes their metes and bounds; and that he foils the intention of his enemies, in such a way as that actions designed to dishonor him, are made to promote his glory, and the good of the universe. We suppose that in temporal and spiritual things he bestows his favors according to his own pleasure. That he gave according as he saw best—angelic powers to Gabriel; a lofty intellect to Newton; wealth to Cræsus; poverty to Lazarus; and zeal to Paul. That by a rule best known to himself, he gives health to one, and sends sickness on another; that he visits one people with the plague, and sends healthful breezes on another; that he clothes one in purple and gives him a throne, and invests another in rags, and places him on a dung-hill. In all these allotments, however, we suppose that men are not of necessity, shut out from his favor; that he that is faithful, and improves the talents given him, shall be accepted of him.

The doctrine then is that God is the Sovereign over created affairs; that what he does, he does according to a plan seen by himself to be wise and good, and made known only when and where he pleases; that he does *what* he pleases, and that the only security that he will do right, is not any control which creatures have over him, but the perfection of his character.

This doctrine I proceed to prove.

I. Our first argument will be drawn from the fact that he is the original creator and proprietor of all things. It will be conceded that this gives him the right to the disposal of them, unless he has expressly surrendered it. For example, he that made the mines of gold in Mexico, and of silver in Potosi, had a right if he chose, to give them to the avaricious Spaniards, rather than to the Pilgrims of New-England. And having this right, he had also the prerogative of directing their way across the ocean, and of pointing their course to the treasures of the South. So he that holds beasts, and fields and forests, and streams in his possession, has an equal right to say who

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shall be their temporary possessor. So of health, and happiness ; of peace and safety ; of country and home ; of life and death.

This right cannot be contested. It is the dictate of common understanding. It is what all men act on, themselves. It has the approbation of conscience. It must be so. No other being has a right to sit down on his throne, and to lord it over his heritage.

Let it be observed also, that his honor is deeply concerned in the direction which created things shall take. He did not make the world for nought. Infinite wisdom has a design in what it does. The world was therefore created for some purpose. Shall that purpose be gained ? Or shall the Creator be foiled and disappointed ? If the latter, then he has vacated his throne. If the former, then he is a Sovereign. If created things shall accomplish what he meant them to, then he will so far direct them as to secure the result. If not, then the world is without a father, and without a God. Then Chaos is where God should be, and night, dark as Erebus, has gathered around, and closed over the throne of light ; and God, wearied, and sickened, has gone from his own works, and we are shut up to the undirected miseries of a forsaken world.

As God created these things, therefore for his glory, and as his honor is concerned in the result, the only question is, whether he has given up the claim of control, and abandoned creation, or whether he still retains it, and is a Sovereign. This can be learned only from his own declarations. Our

2d. Source of proof therefore will be the Bible. The Lord reigneth, says the Psalmist ;* he is clothed with majesty ; he is clothed with strength wherewith he hath girded himself ; the world also is established that it cannot be moved. Thy throne is established of old ; thou art from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice ; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than many waters ; yea than the mighty waves of the sea. So says Christ, a sparrow falls not to the ground without your Father ; and the very hairs of the head are all numbered.† So in the text, God is said to do his pleasure in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. The wrath of man he says shall praise him, and the remainder of wrath he will restrain.‡ The way of man, says Jeremiah, is not in himself : it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.§ So absolute is the control of God, that he directs human life ; overrules human wrath ; controls the way of man ; and often contrary to his intention directs him where he would not go.

To the same purpose are all the promises made to christians, that affairs shall be overruled for their welfare ; and all the threatenings to sinners that judgment shall overtake them. If God is not the Sovereign of the world, and has not supreme direction of all things,

* Psalm 93, 1, 4. † Matt. 10—29, 30. ‡ Psalm 76—10. § 10—23.

how can he give the assurance of aid to his people, and with what propriety can he threaten woe to the rebellious? On this assurance also is the propriety of the song of praise, Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

The sacred scriptures therefore clearly assert the fact for which we contend. If these declarations of holy writ would not establish a doctrine, any number of passages would be equally unsatisfactory. I proceed to another proof—that drawn from an actual survey of the world.

No man was ever yet mad enough to suppose that the affairs of men are equal, nor foolish enough to deny, that the inequality is owing in a most important sense to God. In one respect men come into the world indeed on an equality. Of all creatures the most feeble and helpless, the infant is placed in a world of suffering, and if life is prolonged, with the certainty of sin. Yet how soon is this equality of the original condition varied. Soon the hand of disease is laid on one, and the broken hearted parent weeps over its sweet unbroken slumbers in the grave. Another, feeble and weak, pines out a sickly existence, and reaches the period of playful childhood, and also dies. Another travels on to the bloom of youth, and with every virtue clustering around him, and the name and hopes of families resting on him, is stopped "in the midst of his way," and goes also to the dwelling of the dead. Of those that live, one is clothed in rags, another appears in purple; one ascends "the steep where fame's proud temple shines afar," another lives and dies unknown; one travels on to honor and office, and another, more wise, sits in the humble vale of contentment and peace; one closes his days in a ripe old age, on a bed of down, another his "co-eval remnant of himself," lies at his gate, and putrid before death, breathes his life to the howling winds, and both go to God. Who orders these changes? That some are the work of man—of prudence or folly, none denies. That they all bear proof that God presides over human affairs, who will also deny? That perfect equality in temporal things is given to man, who will maintain?

Take another fact. No small part of the joys or sorrows of man, are the result of their birth. One man is born in Africa, and lives and dies an African. His misery of condition; his wants, his ignorance, and perhaps long years of painful servitude, are made certain by his birth. Another is born an Indian. Far from civilized life—in the wild woods, roaming in the solitude of rocks and streams, where no man dwells, he learns the use of the bow, and the art of savage war, and there his knowledge stops. He lives an Indian. He possesses the character of a savage. He hears perhaps, or knows of no other character. He dies an Indian—ignorant of the true God, and perhaps the victim of malignant passions, or vicious indulgence. Another is born in the fields or mountains of Asia. He is a roving Tartar; or a haughty Turk; or a fixed and staid man of China.

The circumstances of his birth determine his religion, his knowledge, his wealth; perhaps his death. One is born in England, inheriting the name and wealth of an ancient family; cradled in a palace—the abode of ancient princes or kings; he is dandled on the knee of kindness, and nurtured in the lap of ease, and indulgence. Another is born in a cottage, or a “hedge”—the heir of poverty, the offspring of crime—his only inheritance the emoluments of a beggar.* Another breathes the air of liberty in the freest nation of the world—born in *our* land, and permitted to aspire to the offices of highest trust in the state. Another, at his door, in the same soil of freedom, “is guilty of a skin not colored” like the white man—the heir of slavery—born to toil and ignorance, and shut out alike from honor and office. Who will maintain that God is not a Sovereign, dispensing his favors as he pleases?

Look at another condition of human things. Over nations God holds the sceptre of a Sovereign. He setteth up one and pulleth down another. He gave mild skies, and plains, and food, and triumph to Napoleon, treading the green fields of Italy, and compassing the eternal city, and Italy fell before the youthful conqueror. In the maturer day of him who subdued the place of the Cæsars, he met the proud conqueror, with the howling winds, and deep snows and binding frosts of the North. He suffered flames to rise amidst the mighty city, and around the lofty Kremlin, and the invading host was stretched on the plains of Russia cold in death. On one nation he breathes pestilence—on another famine—on another war, or altogether on the same people, while another smiles in peace. One he imbues with wisdom—another he gives up to distracted counsels. One man travels in the greatness of his strength—the mighty conqueror, yet soon “hell is moved to meet him at his coming, and the dead rouse themselves and say, art thou become like one of us.” Who will assert that God sends equality on nations? Who denies that he is the Sovereign over conquerors and kings; and rules amidst their pomp, and lays their honors low?

Look again. Who appoints our green fields, our wholesome clime, our genial laws? Who diffuses the blessings of education, and liberty? Who gives us wise and equal laws? Who but God? But has he dealt so with every nation? What then mean the wide rolling seas of sand, and the pathless deserts of Africa? What mean the degradation of the Hottentot, the Hindoo, the Islander? What mean eternal snows, and ever piercing cold at the North? What mean the cries of the oppressed—the groaning of the prisoner—the shame of the naked—the famished outstretched hands of the hungry? What mean the shrieks of the infant sacrificed under infernal laws; and the groans of the old man stretched out to die, abandoned by his

* For some of the illustrations of this, and a few other paragraphs, the author is indebted to a Sermon by the late Dr. Dwight.

children, on the banks of the Ganges; or the drowned scream of the burning widow in the arms of loathsome putrefaction? Has God ordered the circumstances of men alike, or is he a Sovereign disposing of men and kingdoms as he pleases. Let the facts that stretch from pole to pole, speak.

View the world in another aspect. The well laid plans of men are often frustrated. The young man, striving for the highest seat of honor, often reaches not half the way, and faints in his course. The aspirant for office sees some man of feebler powers pressed forward by the multitude, and honors which *he* sought, given to others. The man in professional life sees business and profit, notwithstanding his own faithfulness and skill, go into the hands of a rival. The husbandman often finds blighting and mildew in his fields; or the palmer worm destroying the fruit of his toil. Hard by him, it may be, his neighbor smiles in prosperity. His fields spread out the rich waving harvest to the sun; wealth is poured into his bosom; health dwells in his family; his plans are all prosperous; and his life is a smooth and tranquil sea. In the mean time the labors of the other are ill-rewarded; every thing seems to go wrong; "the stars in their courses fight against" him; every plan fails; every unpropitious wind that visits the neighborhood whistles around his dwelling; every disease, allotted to the chastisement of the community, fastens on his household.

Probably every man that I address, has laid out some plan for future life. We deem our dwellings fixed, and think we could draw on a map the great outlines of our course. Yet who knows what a day may bring forth? And could our fancied chart be laid beside the *real* one, how faint would be the resemblance! How many changes, and chances—how many shoals and rocks would it be found that we had left out of view! How soon may all our schemes be rendered uncertain—our whole course of life varied, our foundations unsettled, and our hopes blasted.

One other fact drawn from the character of the world in proof that God is a Sovereign over human affairs. It is, that the wildest and worst schemes of the wicked, have been overruled, and directed to the honor of God and the good of the universe. The wrath of man is made to praise him. Men mean not so, neither do their hearts think so, but it is in their hearts to destroy. A few facts will show what we mean—the whole history of the wicked, will hereafter afford reflection on the amazing power of God in bringing good out of evil. The madness and folly of the monarch of Egypt, was made the occasion of an illustrious display of the power of God. For this cause said the Most High to the haughty potentate, for this cause have I raised thee up—to show in thee my power, and that my name might be declared through all the earth. The fell malignity of the Jews, was the cause of the death of Jesus; an event connected with the redemption of man, and all his hopes. The introduction of sin,

That fell monster; that scourge of the universe, and peopler of two worlds with wo, has been made the occasion of the most signal display of the love and justice of God. But for this fell act in Eden, when man brought death into the world and all our wo, the harp of praise in heaven, would never have been swept by the songs of redeeming mercy, and glad hallelujahs among the angels, would have been unknown, in hailing as kinsmen and brothers those redeemed from death. The first sin, every succeeding sin, the enmity of the Jews, the treason of Judas—the crimes of the world, have been made to come around the cross, and to see there the justice of God with the vividness of the lightning's flash, and mercy there pouring a full stream of benevolence to refresh, and beautify the universe.

Take a fact from modern times. Voltaire the arch infidel of the last age of the world, deluged France with books of infidelity. With a liberality, reminding one by its energy, of apostolic self-denial—he poured from the press the massive tome, and the winged Traet on infidelity, to find their way to the palaces of the great, and the cottages of the poor. So far as France was concerned, the effect yet perceived, was direct and infernal. But in less than half a century, the scheme originated by him, has conveyed the gospel to millions. In a century more, the plan sired by French infidelity—the gratuitous distribution of books and tracts, may have carried the gospel to half the globe. France herself, having been purified by a needful wading in human gore, may see messengers of truth poured in with the zeal of her Rosseau, and Voltaire, and the palm tree planted by hands, learning their art, for those that reared the deadly Upas. Even now the very press, once there groaning under the weight of incumbent infidel philosophy, has become sacred in the printing of the Bible, and already speaks the language of life, to the sons and daughters of those whom it formerly led to the guillotine.

Who has not seen a hard-hearted miser, cool, and wretchedly selfish, begrudging himself his necessary food and raiment; and placing screws and racks on every son of misfortune, that he might get “the pound of flesh,”* or rob him of his farm or his bed—dying with the hope that his mantle would descend on a living Shylock? who has not seen his sons converted to God, and scattering the ill-gotten wealth of the father, in doing good to a fallen world? So have I seen an obscene and wretched scoffer, overact his part, and disgust his friends, and render himself an object of hate and shunning—the wrath of the scoffing infidel, made to praise God. So in the future world, every scoffer and sinner shall be made to praise him. Law will be honored, and justice vindicated by each groan, and all the sufferings of the place of torment, speak of the righteous indignation of God.

We would say, therefore, to a wicked man, though you would be the last of all persons to seek the honor of God; though you would

* Shakspeare.

turn with abhorrence from an exhortation to promote his glory, yet in sin and suffering, you may be constrained to do the very thing which you abhor. God created you for his glory—his glory in purity and happiness, if you would; if you would not, in wretchedness and woe. Nor shall God be foiled. In some way you must shew his praise. In glory yet, if you will;—if you will not, in increasing crime and despair. You are in his hands; and your existence, is not, cannot, be in vain. He may endure long the vessels of wrath filled for destruction; but in due time your feet shall slide, and your damnation will not linger. The wrath of man shall praise him.

The proof that God is a sovereign, and dispenses favors according to his pleasure in *temporal* things, is in these facts. He that would attempt to deny these facts, must be mad, and blind. That men make great changes themselves, and do much to effect their own destiny, we do not deny. Still the great leading differences we have maintained, are clearly to be traced to God: and to this arrangement in temporal things, however mysterious, there seems to be no opposition. Provision for eternal life, is made equally for the beggar and the prince; and in every situation men may be accepted. The *principle* however is settled in these facts. If it is right for God to be a sovereign in the distribution of *temporal* favors, it would seem to be equally proper in *spiritual*. It would seem to be fair also, when these facts stare us in the eyes every where, to expect to find the same thing in the dispensation of his grace. At least there is no presumption against it. Let us then briefly enquire what are the *facts* in the spiritual world.

Here we are struck with a state of things in entire accordance with what we have presented. Indeed no small part of the difference in human events, to the justice of which I presume I have your assent, is a difference in this very thing. The difference in birth among nations, is a difference pertaining uniformly, among other things, to religion. The fact of being born a Hindoo, or a savage, it is presumed will do *something* towards affecting the eternal destiny. At any rate, it is not easy to see why it will not be as reasonable that it should affect man at any given period beyond the grave, as here.

In casting the eye over the world, we behold mercies bestowed upon many to be traced only to God, and millions destitute of those blessings. In temporal things, we say that riches, and health, are given according to his good pleasure. What principle of justice is violated, if we say so also in reference to religion?

Right or wrong, however, this is the fact; and a man would be as well employed in denying that the sun ever gives light, as in denying this fact. Men differ in religious privileges—a difference in their birth to be traced only to God; this difference, makes certain a difference in their character—their character shapes their destiny here and hereafter. One is a Pagan, all his life; another a Turk,

another a dweller in a Christian land. One has opportunity of instruction, another has not. One is the child of pious parents, another is the son of a blasphemer. One is placed early in a revival of religion, another never knows of such a phenomenon—or is the companion of fools and scoffs at it. Among the same people, in the use of the same means of grace, and perhaps under the same sermon, one becomes a christian and the other not. And what is matter of daily observation, the man that *we* should most likely select as the one to be converted, is often the very one that lives and dies a stranger to religion. Two scoffers go to the same sanctuary for the same purpose of making derision. Soon one begins to doubt the propriety of the errand. He begins to fear that religion is true. He learns that he is a sinner. He trembles. His eye wanders for help. The universe, the preacher, the hearers, and God, seem to fix the gaze on him. The color comes and goes; and trembling and astonished he asks what he must do to be saved. He becomes a christian, and becomes such only by the grace of God. The other scoffs on; and now scoffs at his supposed foolish companion, and dies as he lived. Two children equally the subjects of instruction and prayer, are brought in the range of the same truth. One becomes a believer, the other lives and dies only a moral man. Of two wicked men, one lives, and becomes a follower of Christ; the other of the same age, is cut down without evidence of repentance, and dies in his sins.

Who is there to deny these facts—let them be accounted for as they may be? Who is there that can deny that the one which has become a christian, has done so by the grace of God. If he does he denies the Bible.* If this be by the grace of God, who denies that he gives mercy according to his own pleasure? or that he is a sovereign?

And it is on this principle that men act, and preach. What minister of Jesus Christ is there that ever claimed the power of changing the heart? Not one. For what then do they preach? What is the hope that they will meet with success? What but that God will bless their labors, and bear the word to the sinner's conscience—that is, convert one, or all of their hearers as he pleases, or be the sovereign? What cheers them in their work but the hope that while they draw the bow at a venture, God will, with unerring aim, direct the arrow to the sinner's heart, and bathe it in his blood? I confess to you, my brethren, that this is the only hope on which I preach the gospel. While I attempt to make the law, in thunders speak its violated claims, and the gospel to whisper strains of peace; and even while I attempt to vindicate the abused sovereignty of heaven's king, I have hope that HE will preside over those thunders, and encompass those strains, and cause men to bow to his righteous dominion. Nor have I hope any where else. Were there not encouragement that it may be so, these lips might as well be pale in death; and this arm

* James 1, 18—1 Peter 1, 23—John 1, 13—John 3: 3, 5.

fall from its socket; and the doors and windows of this sanctuary be blinded; and this house be made a dark prison of despair. And I do not deem it too serious to say, that were there no hope that God would interpose and save man in his own way, you might as well seal the lips of every minister of Jesus, and cover every pulpit with the habiliments of mourning, and hang a funeral pall around the universe.

Nay you *would* do it, and *would shroud a world of sin and suffering in hopeless wo*, and make every candidate for eternity, a living grave—a moving monument of unpitied and helpless despair. In God is help, and there alone—and cheered by this alone, I, and all other ministers preach.

Such are facts. That they may not be denied, I hardly dare hope. That some of my hearers will attempt to explain them away I fear. That they may be abused I fear also. Nevertheless they are facts: and shall remain eternal monuments of the sovereignty of God:—though opposed, and explained, and tortured in a fiery crucible.—So Emmets around the base of a mountain would be thought to attempt to remove the mighty mass, grain by grain. But the everlasting hills remain; as the eternal truth of God, remains to give beauty to the moral universe, while man—poor dying man, tugs at its base, and bearing an atom in a mote, dreams that the eternal hills tremble on their foundation, and must fall.

But these are not merely facts; they are facts easily vindicated. To that in the

3rd place I proceed. If proved, it would seem that this alone was a sufficient vindication. If God does a thing, it is the best evidence we can have that it is right. But we are not left to this summary mode of satisfying ourselves that God has a right to reign. Satisfactory reasons press upon us on every hand. Let it be remembered in the first place, that man has no claim on God, except that of justice—a claim that if urged, would only involve him in perpetual suffering. Whatever claims you may suppose a *holy* being might have on God, yet surely a *sinful* being has none. The act of sin, is at once a solemn renunciation of the protection and government of the Most High. When such a renunciation has been deliberately made—and every sinner has made it, then God must be *free* to bestow every favor on him, or none, at his pleasure. The whole race then lie at his footstool undeserving—a race of criminals condemned by conscience, and law, and justly to be left if God chooses, to the desert of their ways. For it is clearly as right that God should leave one or all the human race, as to leave the fallen angels.

If God then bestows a favor on one of these fallen beings, he does no injury to another. He violated none of my rights by bestowing great talents on Newton, or great wealth on Solomon. He was not unjust to me in making Paul an apostle, or Brainard a man of almost unequalled piety. He was not unjust to me, in opening before the companions of my youth the avenues to wealth, or civil office. Nor

in giving to others splendid mansions, a gilded equipage, or mighty kindred. Nor is he unjust to me, that another is in health when I am sick; or composed when I am in perplexity; or raised up when I am cast down; or safe when I am in danger. Nor can I complain that John, and James, and Peter were on Tabor, and not I; nor that Paul was caught up into heaven, and I did not attend him side by side. The question is, has God given me favors which I do not deserve? If he has, am I thankful—or do I envy those more favored than I am? Each favor bestowed on me, or others, is undeserved: each should claim appropriate thanksgiving.

Let it be remembered also that men do not by nature *desire* heaven's highest gifts. Most men are satisfied without holiness or salvation. A gilded robe; or a showy garment; or momentary pleasure, or a heap of gold is all they ask. For these they pant. In the attainment of these they weary out their powers, and die. For purity and heaven they pant not. For the peace of religion, they have no desire. Why should they murmur that God gives to others what they love not, and do not value? Why complain that God gives the graces of the spirit to whom he pleases—graces which they despise; for which they make no sacrifice; and for which they do not and will not toil? Let them seek what they love—pleasure, property, honor. In the splendid mansion which they have purchased with the best part of their probation, why should they not die? On the bed of down, which they have sought as their highest peace and repose, why should they not sleep the sleep of death? And why not be content that God gives them what they sought most, a name, a home, a splendid sepulchre. Assured that if they *desired* higher gifts they might possess them, why should they not suffer Lazarus to have what *he* desires—the blessing that God gives him in pain and disease, if they may have *their* wish, a robe of purple and fine linen, and a magnificent consigning to the empire of worms? Can they complain that God is wrong when they seek only this, and would abhor, and curse and hate the state of Lazarus? Assuredly not.

It is well to believe that the universe is under control. That all this evil is not for nought. That there is a presiding Being in the midst of this chaos. That it is not chance and hap-hazard and eternal confusion. Who amidst the fury of the tempest, and on the billows of the deep, does not rejoice to feel that there is a God who directs the tempest, and who will fix its bounds? Go, see the storm gather, and cloud roll on cloud, and fire flash along the heavens, and roll on the earth, and fields and men, and herds desolate and amazed, and whose heart does not rejoice that there is a hand that rolls the clouds, and wields the thunder, and makes a path for the lightning? Even so in the tempest of sin, and wo, that sweeps over the earth. It has metes and bounds. An unseen hand is in this storm; and will in yonder world, as here, after the storm, light up a brighter sky, and make a purer air as the result of the fury of the elements.

It is well to believe that the affairs of the universe are under control. That God, as well as parents, and kings, reigns over his empire. Why should a monarch sway his sceptre over his kingdom, and assign rewards and offices according to his pleasure; and a parent sit in his little dominion, and control his sons and daughters, and not God also? Has man more confidence in an earthly parent—or in a haughty monarch, than in the ever blessed God?

It is consoling to believe that God has the power of arresting human wickedness, and that in due time it will come to an end. If not, in what a universe is our lot; and where, ye sons of men, is your hope of safety? Unless God has the right to break the arm of the oppressor, and close the mouth of the curser, and disgorge from the universe the drunkard and the adulterer, where is the hope that his people shall be pure, or any part of his empire happy?

It is the only hope of a sinner. It is the only prospect that you will be rich, or healthy, or honored, or long-lived that God is a sovereign, and will give you what you desire. So of heaven. The only hope that man will be pardoned or saved is that his Maker may please to grant him deliverance from the incumbent load of crime.—Thou art a sinner. Thy conscience has a thousand times told thee so. A thousand times in as many ways, thou hast heard the offer of pardon. And a thousand times thou hast rejected it. Thou hast despised the Savior; grieved his spirit; trampled law and gospel in the dust; rode on the whirlwind of passion; slaked your thirst in the muddy fountain of intoxication, or lust; and opposed all the ways that have been presented to save thee. Where, sinner, is thy hope of heaven? Is it in *self*; in man; in the means you have despised; in the hope of repentance hereafter? Or is it in God? It is in God, and there only. Like the poor emaciated victim of vice, stretched on a bed of dying, given over by physicians—or having rejected *all* physicians, and despised all aid, whose only hope is in the undeserved mercy of heaven's offended King, you lie before a sovereign God. If he speak, and say sinner live, you will rise to the pure joys of heaven; if he speak not, and leave you to your chosen ways, sinner, you will die. Shut him out from the sovereignty of the world, and you *must* die. You *would* not save yourself; and not Gabriel, nor all created favor *could* save. You are then shut up to the mercy of God. Because that great Sovereign directs human things, there is hope. When he leaves you, or withdraws his spirit, or closes your life, you perish.

And shall we not put confidence in God? Is there no voice in the bosom of man—none in the world where we dwell—none in the book that he has given to guide us, saying that God is wise, and just and good, and that he will do all things right? Shall we startle at the thought that God reigns—and doubt that he will do all things well? Were he a tyrant on the throne; a Nero, or a Moloch, men would do well to start back at our doctrine. But shall men be afraid to trust the affairs of the universe to its Creator? And am I in a world of

God's creating, and told that men are afraid that the infinite God is not qualified for universal empire? Are men afraid, and suspicious, and fearful that God will do them wrong? Then are we indeed in a world that needs a moral governor. When men are suspicious of the God that made them, and are harboring dark and rebellious thoughts, then it is time that the world *should* be controlled. Then here is a new argument that God *will* do it.

Once more—the doctrine I am defending is true, or its opposite. But are men prepared to believe that they are in a world of chance, where there is no plan; no controller; no prospect that good shall come out of evil; no hope God will aid them; no belief that wisdom has appointed their lot? If this be true then are we indeed in a forsaken and fatherless world. Then are we indeed orphans, straying in a wilderness without food, or raiment, or home. Then am I and you, the sport of chance; the prey of fate;—lost wanderers, without hope, and without a friend. Then my sorrows are for nought; my sins cannot be subdued; my soul cannot triumph over its foes; my mercies come from none to whom I may express thanksgiving. Then may I pour out my thanks or curses on stones, and storms, and suns and stars, but there is no God to whom I may come—no strong tower into which I may run and be safe. Then is my existence a dream; my hope delusion; my death desirable; my eternity the stillness and damps of the grave. Are you prepared to believe that you are in such a world? No—no man believes it. “Nature runs back, and shudders at the thought.” Then God reigns; God is the hope of the righteous and the wicked—the only hope that we shall enter heaven.

Perhaps after all, in spite of my proofs, there may be minds not prepared to follow me—and perhaps those that may abuse this doctrine to their ruin. If they do they must answer it to God. I am answerable for the discharge of a duty, and the vindication of a truth, pressed in an unusual mode on my attention. By a train of thoughts and events, which reason does not forbid us to trace to the sovereignty of God, I have been led to the ultimate selection and discussion of this subject. The arguments that occurred to me, I have presented. Whether these arguments awe the sinner or confirm the christian, is not mine in responsibility. My duty is done, and I am now prepared to leave these remarks with you, and with a sovereign God, with a few thoughts selected from the many that start with rich luxuriance from this subject.

1. When statements are made respecting this, and the kindred doctrines of the Bible, it is fair to expect that they should be made according to truth. No claim is of a higher order than that which demands that our sentiments should be fairly represented. Every man has a right to explain his own opinions. Every man feels himself hurt, and his rights violated, when others assume the officious province of explaining his sentiments for him—of taking his views out of their connection, and of turning them into travesty and ridicule.

In the language of common life, and in courts of law, this is slander.

The same right to a fair expression of sentiment, is claimed, and should be conceded, for any association of men. It has been usually thought fair that any society of men, should be the only authorized expounders of their own sentiments, and should be held answerable only for what they profess to maintain. Nor has it been commonly thought to be proper to charge them with holding any sentiments, which *others* may draw from their opinions, unless they explicitly avow them as their own. Such inferences may be used to confute them if possible, but they cannot be charged as their belief. If I am inconsistent, or hold opinions that lead to contradictions or absurdities, or even blasphemies, that is *one* thing, and any man has a right to convince me of it if he can:—that I *hold* those inferences and results is quite another thing, and should not be charged upon me unless I distinctly avow them as my belief. Every man has a right—and an exclusive right to *say* what he believes—nor is it easy to see how any other men can be in possession of the knowledge to determine the point any further than the expression of belief has been made.

These remarks are of special applicability on the subject of religion. No opinions are so dear—none wind themselves so tenderly around the heart—none enter so much into the vitality of man, and constitute his inalienable possession—as his religious sentiments.—They are his life—the foundation of his hopes—his richest inheritance. They constitute his character in its most tender and sacred points. They determine his hopes of heaven and his views of the moral government of God. I add that no man is so unfeeling, and so unkind a calumniator as he that wilfully misrepresents the religious opinions of another.

Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that, which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.

I do not fight uncertainty, nor beat the air. The friends of the great truth that I have been defending, and its kindred doctrines, have in all ages had cause to complain that their views do not find a candid statement except when they fall from their own lips. The *motives* of others they do not presume to arraign; they fix their eyes on the fact, and have always grieved that other men have not felt themselves bound to exhibit their sentiments as they have found them. In many it may have been honest misconception, where they candidly received a wrong impression;—in many it may have been the fault of education—the early bias given to the mind by uncandid parents;—in many it may be want of comprehension—the actual disability of seeing the connection of one thing with another—a case where common prudence required silence. In many it may be ignorance, or where no pains is taken to gain information, and where

no explanation is or will be heard. In a few cases it may be pure malignity. In many cases *consequences* are changed as a part of the belief—consequences expressly disavowed, and consequences which ought to be known to be disavowed. By one, they are charged as holding that God made men to damn them—a sentiment not held by any denomination of christians from the foundation of the world. By another that God has no respect to character—a charge equally untrue. By another that he *makes* men sin, and then punishes them for it; a charge that is known, or ought to be known, to be equally unauthorized. By another, that God has no desire for the salvation of wicked men—makes no offers to them, and would be grieved if they should accept the offers made to others, and be saved;—a sentiment also known to be “far as the centre thrice to the utmost pole,” from the truth.

We judge not of the motives of men in making these statements. We advert only to the kind and tender-hearted treatment which the doctrine I have defended, has met with in this world; and present it as a curious fact in the philosophy of mind, as well as in the progress of religion, that a religious doctrine, which shall be successfully assailed only when God’s moral government shall be blotted out—and he abdicate his throne, and the reign of chaos again commence, should have encountered such singular misrepresentations, and kindled the ire so much of men claiming the name of christians.

I have only to add, that, *as far as I know*, I have given in this discourse a fair statement of the doctrine as held in the churches of which I am an unworthy minister; and that we claim of all whose eyes may rest on these humble pages—*not as courtesy but as a matter of right*, that if they make any explanations of our views, they do it according to the spirit and letter of the statement, and not according to the laws of fancy or of inference. To our own master we stand or fall, in holding the belief that God governs mankind.

2. This doctrine has encountered no small opposition from the hearts of impenitent men, and I hence urge the strong presumption that it is true. When a particular religious sentiment encounters the special hatred of wicked men, it is no small evidence that it is correct. Yet who ever saw a man of pride, and profaneness, and infidelity, that did not most cordially set himself against the belief that God reigns, and will *foil him* in his wicked plans, and make his wrath to praise him? What unrenewed human heart is there that cordially acquiesces in the statement that God has mercy on whom he will have mercy? What lofty minded sinner is willing to humble himself, and to lie at his Creator’s footstool and receive life as an undeserved gift? Not one. And against what are all the clamors of wicked men on the subject of religion? What bosoms boil most with rage; and what eyes flash most fury; and from what hands are hurled most missiles and mock thunderbolts against God? Where but from men that are least pleased with their Maker’s scheme of government; and on whom the duty of submitting unqualifiedly to that government is

most faithfully urged. Now it is not desirable in itself to preach a doctrine that is known to be at war with the worst passions of mankind, and where we know some unholy waters will be ruffled, and mire and dirt heave and roll to the surface. Yet it is no small consolation to know that a doctrine that is held, ranges against it the scoffer, and the sensualist, and the man of infidelity. At least it is no uncomfoting evidence of its truth.

I add that no men are more miserable than the wicked who oppose God's government. They rage, and storm, and hate, in vain. They are doomed perpetually to see the affairs of God's empire go on pretty much as if they had no being. They are reduced to cyphers, and wholly overlooked in their counsels about governing the world; are compelled to find that they are of much less importance than they had supposed themselves to be; and at last ascertain that God will direct his own affairs pretty much as he pleases; and, what is most humiliating and least to be endured, will foil their schemes—dash their hopes—stay their haughty strides—and make their wrath to praise him. If we were therefore to select him that had the least peace of mind, the least solid joy in possession or prospect, it would be the man, who amidst wealth perhaps, has set his mouth against the heavens; or who in poverty and vice, has said that he will not have God to reign over him.

To such a one, if my voice should ever reach such a one, I would say, haughty man you ride a troubled sea. You live in tempests.—Yea war with a feeble arm, and you cannot strive successfully with your Maker, nor thunder with a voice like his. You enter not heaven over his prostrate throne. Jehovah reigns; and what can created strength accomplish? Reptiles and worms might twist and writhe, and unite their counsels, to pluck the rays from the sun, and to stay his chariot in the heavens, and rage and exert their malice that he still shone on other lands, and poured comforts on other beings. And so the wicked writhe, and rage in the pure effulgence of Jehovah's government, and with just the same success. Why sinner, should you not submit to a scheme that you cannot successfully oppose, and that now and hereafter will only make you wretched? Nay why not find peace in submitting to a scheme that your reason and conscience tell you is right? Thousands there, even in calamity and death, have sailed on the bosom of a tranquil sea. All others flounder in the surges, and sink in the overwhelming billows that burst upon a wicked world.

3 Let not this doctrine be abused, to produce security in sin.—

We have defended no such doctrine as that the sinner has nothing to do. We have stated the only encouragement that his efforts will be of avail. With the hope of help from God in mild skies, and genial suns, and timely showers, men plough the fields, and sow the seed, and look forward to the harvest. With equal propriety, and equal necessity, should men labor on the subject of religion. Nay with more. In temporal things, God often interposes, and destroys

The expectation of the husbandman, and the confidence of men of art and commerce. Hail and storms beat down the grain; or the palmer worm destroys its verdure; or the lightnings of heaven prostrate the labors of the architect; or the ship sinks in the ocean. Yet what farmer labors less because God is thus a sovereign. What city is stayed in its building because heaven's lightnings may kindle the lofty edifice? What merchant binds his ship to the port, or takes away the canvass, because storms bellow on the deep, and the riches of India may sink amid the corals of the ocean? Not one.—But does God thus foil the efforts of men in religion? Of that there is no proof. None has yet reposed, patient and humble, in the arms of the sovereign of heaven, and found his sceptre iron, his brow brass, and his heart adamant.

Nor have I fear of proclaiming this doctrine. That a *few* hardened men, seeking excuse for continuance in rebellion, may not abuse it I would not warrant. But I have no fear of proclaiming it in the most unqualified manner, when the broken-hearted sinner trembles under the government of God, and asks what he must do to be saved? When I see, as I have done within a few months, hundreds trembling in view of their rebellion, and seeking the way of pardon, then I have no fear of directing them to the bosom of their offended sovereign, and of telling them that they are shut up to the mere mercy of God. If he extends the sceptre they live. If not they die. No created arm—no minister or angel—no father—no brother, or companion saves. God only redeems and forgives. Then the sinner comes and lives, or, staying away in rebellion, he surely dies.

4 Here then is the only hope of man—man sinning and man dying. Where else will you go? To chaos, and chance, and discord? Will you shut God out of his world, and open your bosom to the spite of men, and the malice of devils, and feel that in the ungoverned malignity of a wicked world you are safe? Will you look to suns and skies, and clouds, and fields and streams, for comfort and deliverance in the day of want, and danger, and woe? Over those suns, and clouds, and streams, according to all other schemes but the one I have defended, no God presides. They pour their fiery beams, or heave their thunders, or roll their floods undirected; and who is safe? Will you look to friends, and wealth, and honors? How short their arm; how motionless their lips in regard to comfort; how dull their eye, when, we lie on a bed of death! No, sinner; no, christian; range the world over—try every system—make friends of all arts, and honors, and men—repose on every hope that has been extended for a dying guilty man, and then if you ever find peace this side the grave—or peace beyond, you will find it only in the belief that the universe has a Father and a God. Safe beneath his throne you may lie; and in affluence or poverty, rolling in a chariot of splendor, or breathing out your jaded and wearied life on a pallet of straw, you may shout with angels and archangels ALLELUJAH, THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH.



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