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SERMON CCCXLI.

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THE GREAT SEPARATION.

“I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”—MAT. x. 35.

THE subject which is suggested by these words, is, THE GREAT SEPARATION WHICH RELIGION MAKES IN FAMILIES. The Savior, in the text, simply states a fact. He does not say that he *aimed* at such a separation; or that it was in itself desirable; or that religion would be responsible for it; or that there would be no possibility of avoiding it: he states the fact simply as it would occur—evidently in his view a lamentable fact, and one that would be attended sooner or later with unhappy results. The union of families is desirable. It is such an object as the “Prince of peace” would seek. But the meaning of the Savior in the text is, that his religion, by calling out one part of a family from another, would in fact tend to divide them, and would be the innocent cause of alienation. “I am come,” said he, “to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” Endeavoring to keep the spirit of these words in view, and to pursue such a line of thought as shall best illustrate them, I shall invite your attention to two points.

I. The union of families in religion is desirable. And,

II. Religion in fact often separates them.

I. The union of families in religion is desirable; or, in other words, it is desirable that a family should be all united in the same faith, and in the same hope of heaven.

Before suggesting the reasons for this—which indeed appear obvious almost without argument or illustration—I would observe, that in other subjects than religion, separations often occur in a family which create no evil, and which are in fact unavoidable. They are such as

SERMON CCCXLII

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THE SOVEREIGN PURPOSE OF GOD TO SAVE HIS PEOPLE AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO EFFORT.

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“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee, to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.”—Acts xviii : 9, 10.

The Gospel, when first preached, every where encountered difficulties. The obstacles to its diffusion were laid primarily in the depravity of the human heart, but those obstacles were modified by the customs, the opinions, the prejudices, the philosophy which prevailed in particular places. In Jerusalem, the main difficulty arose from the disappointed hopes and the prejudices of the Jews; in Ephesus, from the dread of losing the gains accruing to a portion of the citizens from the connexion of the mechanic arts with idolatry; in Athens, from the reigning philosophy of the Epicureans and the Stoics. In Jerusalem, in Ephesus, and in many other places, the apostles had seen these difficulties give way, and the gospel assert its ascendancy there in the conversion of multitudes. On the philosophy of Athens almost no impression was made, and having preached there with less success than attended his ministry elsewhere, Paul turned his steps to the neighboring city of Corinth. Here a new difficulty met him. It was not Jewish prejudice; it was not the self-interest of men whose “gains” were likely to be taken from them by the prevalence of the new religion; it was not philosophy rendering the heart inaccessible to all the appeals of truth, it was that which has been always, wherever it has existed, a greater obstacle to the gospel than all these combined—the prevalence of moral corruption. In Corinth this corruption pervaded all classes of citizens. It made the name of the city proverbial throughout Greece, and the world. It had caused splendid temples to be reared devoted to impurity. It attracted strangers there from all

lands, and that splendid city had become the centre of pollution for the whole world. Amidst this universal dissoluteness of manners, Paul needed some special encouragement in his work there. That encouragement was granted him, and the record of it constitutes my text. "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; *for I have much people in this city.*" That is, he had 'much people' there whom he *designed* to convert and save. It cannot mean that there were many there who were *then* his people, or who in fact loved and served him, for that was not true, and that was not the encouragement which Paul needed. It must mean that there were those there in large numbers whom he intended to save, and to whom he now sent the gospel as the means of their conversion, and whom, therefore, He, who calls "things that are not as though they were," might call "his people." In the corrupt, debased, and sunken mass then bowing down in polluted temples, and giving unrestrained indulgence to the form of sin which offers the most direct resistance to "the gospel of the blessed God," there were those whom he meant to "wash, to sanctify, and to justify, in the name of the Lord Jesus," and to save. The doctrine of the text, then, it is not difficult to perceive. It is, that the purposes of divine sovereignty are an encouragement to efforts in doing good; or the fact that it is the intention of God to bring his chosen people to heaven, should stimulate us, and cheer us on in our efforts to save souls. This doctrine I propose now to illustrate and defend.

I am aware that it is often supposed that this doctrine has just the opposite tendency. I am not ignorant of the form in which it is often professedly held by the impenitent and the wicked, that "if they are to be saved they will be, and that effort will be useless;" nor am I ignorant of the effect which it may be made to have on many of the professed friends of truth. There is no doctrine of the scriptures which may not be abused; and there is no occasion for denying that this has been so held by many ministers of the gospel, and many churches, as to produce any other effect than to stimulate them to effort for the salvation of souls. And I am not ignorant that there is often real difficulty in pure and honest minds on the subject. If God is a sovereign; if he has a purpose which embraces all things; if he has a plan of electing love by which he designs to save all those who will actually be saved, it *seems* to be a doctrine that will paralyze effort; that will render fruitless all exertion; that repels all human interference, and that must throw the cold chill of death over all the gushing sensibilities that would weep over the lost. But it is not desirable or necessary that it should have this effect on any minds. It had not on the mind of Paul; and I shall render a good service if I can show you that it does not necessarily or properly have this effect. The design of this discourse therefore, is to show, that so far from having of necessity this effect, *the purpose of God to save his elect, is the best ground of calculation, the best basis for effort, and the best encouragement for doing good in*

this world. I shall do this by a series of propositions closely connected but plain, and so clear to all, that I trust they will leave no doubt of their truth.

I. The first is, that in the work of salvation there are many things to be done which are wholly beyond human power, or where the agency of man will be wholly insufficient. In other words, there is a sphere of operations which belongs only to God, and where he only can efficiently act. It is, indeed, no less true, that the same principle exists in regard to all that is to be done with which the agency of a created being has any connexion, but my object requires me to illustrate it particularly only with reference to religion. A man plants a field, or sets out a vine. There is a sphere of agency in the result contemplated that appertains only to God, and where he only can operate, and any calculation which shall anticipate the result without that agency would certainly fail. All that pertains to the sun-beam; to the rain; to the dew; to the revolution of the earth and the return of the seasons; to the atmosphere, to the mysterious laws by which the juices are conveyed through the fibres of the root, and carried up the stem, and diffused to each leaf, and branch, and tendril; to the delicate and beautiful agency by which the leaf is opened, and the fruit formed and matured, all this belongs to God, and there is no human agency that can be substituted in its place. A man fits out a vessel for a distant port. In the success of this mercantile adventure there is a sphere of operations wholly beyond the reach of man. All that relates to the freedom of the ocean from dangerous storms, to prosperous gales, to the purity of the air which the mariner is to breathe on a foreign strand, and to the preservation of life and health, appertain to the exclusive agency of God; and he who leaves out this as a part of his calculation, leaves out that which is an essential element in the question of success. A physician approaches a sick man and prescribes for him. In his recovery there is a work which appertains wholly to God. In the laws which govern health, in the recuperative powers of the human frame, in the guarding of the system from some other insidious and dangerous attack, and in the prolongation of the vital functions, there is a sphere where God only can act. There is no skill, or wisdom, or power, which can do what God has reserved for himself to do;—and though man has done much and boasted more; though he claims to have disarmed the lightning, and can almost people the canvass with living forms, and make the marble breathe; and though he has set up an empire over seas and floods, yet he has made no invasion on the prerogatives of the Almighty, or passed the bounds which were fixed when it was said to him, as to the ocean, “Thus far, but no farther.” He paints no flower; he gilds no insect’s wing; he colors no rainbow on the sky; he lights up no dead matter with the brilliancy of the living eye; he teaches no vital current to meander through an organized frame diffusing beauty, and health, and life. And to the end of time there will be a sphere in which God alone will act, and which will never be invaded by the wit, the skill, or the power of man.

The same thing is just as true in the salvation of the soul. There is a sphere where God only acts; where he only will act; where he only can act. It may not always be easy to mark the limits where human power terminates and where God only can act, but no man can doubt that there *are* such boundaries on all subjects, and the number is not small where it is known that the power of man does not extend. It is settled that he cannot take the lightning in his hands and "direct it under the whole heaven," (Job 37: 3.) he cannot wield the thunderbolt; he cannot hold the fixed-star in its place; he cannot "guide Arcturus and his sons;" he cannot breathe life into the stiffened corse. So in religion. There *are* points where all human agency terminates and is powerless. We may not now be able to mark them all, but there are some that are known. Man cannot pardon sin committed against God, any more than he can bid flowers to spring up to beautify the landscape, or move the stars. He cannot arouse a sinner from his death in sin and breathe into him spiritual life any more than he can raise the dead. He cannot defend the church against her foes, or carry forward her great operations unaided, any more than he can keep up the operations of animated nature. He cannot fix the wandering affections, or control the will, or change the heart of neighbor, brother, or child, any more than he can wield the rapid lightning and fetter it to obey his mandate. He cannot place nations in a posture to receive the gospel, or dispose them to a readiness to throw away their idols, and welcome the herald of salvation. To accomplish these, and kindred things, there is but one power in the universe that is sufficient, and man can substitute nothing in the place of that power. He can do much in his proper sphere; but when he has done all, it will be still true with reference to these things that "it is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord." Man can do much by improving his mental philosophy; he can make large advances in theological knowledge; he can urge far towards perfection his schemes of philanthropy, but he makes no advances in the work of accomplishing in religion what God has reserved for himself to do, any more than in his laboratory he makes advances towards the proper skill and power for creating life in the vegetable world. The work of pardoning sin, of converting and sanctifying the soul, of preserving the church, and of preparing the way for the universal reign of righteousness, is reserved in his own hands, and pertains to a sphere of agency of his own. In regard to such things, *a calculation of success on the basis of man's power, MUST CERTAINLY FAIL.*

II. In the second place, there are many things in regard to salvation, which, although man *might* do them, it is certain he never *will* do them, and the just ground of dependence is to be on the Sovereignty of God. This, also, often occurs in other matters than religion. There are numerous cases in which men *might* save themselves from poverty, and wretchedness, and dissipation, and an early grave, where there is a moral certainty that they never *will* do it, and we can make no calculation on the presumption that they will do it. A man may be so deaf

to all the calls of duty, to self-respect, and to the admonitions of conscience; he may be so under the influence of impetuous and raging passion, that it may be morally certain that, though he has ample power, he never *will* forsake his evil way unless an influence from above shall arrest and change him. So it is in the matter of salvation. We think we can show that a moral agent, such as man is, has all necessary natural ability to obey the law of God; to comply with the terms of the gospel; to repent of his sins; to love his Maker; to forsake the ways of transgression; to lead a holy life. We think a sinner lacks no natural ability to enable him to attend seriously to the subject of religion; to give up his heart to God; to avail himself of the offers of mercy and be saved. We think here is a field of possible human agency, very interesting and very broad, which might be occupied, though it never has been by man. This view we think results from the very nature of moral agency and accountability, nor have we any way of vindicating the character of God if he requires of man more than in any sense he has the power to render. Such a doctrine we think is a violation of the principles of judgment in moral matters with which our Creator has endowed us, and we think it equally clear that it is contrary to the Bible.

But all this may be so, and yet it may be certain that no man will of himself ever put forth his power, or do what he might do in the matter of his own salvation. It is a power which has never been exercised—probably the only power that has always lain wholly dormant in the human soul. Man does not seem to be endowed with any power to move masses of matter, which he has not at some time exercised. He does not seem to have any power to brave the cold of the north, or to climb mountain heights, or to carry fire and sword into regions of unoffending peace, or to corrupt and destroy his fellow-men, or to resist the elements, which he has not at some time put forth. But there is a dormant power in the soul in the matter of salvation, which man of himself never *has* put forth and never *will*. So sunk is he in sin, so absorbed in self, so opposed to holiness and God, so blind to truth and duty, so averse to the cross, so hardened in depravity, that this power never has been exerted, self-originated, since the fall, *and all calculations of success in religion on the basis of the expectation that man will exert it are vain*. You may satisfy his understanding that there is a God, perfectly pure and lovely, but you have done nothing to induce him to love him; you may convince his reason of the claims of christianity, but you have made no advances towards leading him cordially to embrace it; you may press all the motives upon his conscience drawn from his infinite obligations, and the claims of a perfect law, but you have gained no point where the sinner yields; you may appeal to all his interests, and urge all the solemn considerations you can draw from the hope of heaven and the dread of hell—from the desirableness of a peaceful death and a crown of glory, but you have done nothing to induce him to embrace that religion with which he knows all this is to be identified. You may describe the

crown of glory, and the white robe of salvation, and the river of life, and the throne of God, so that the description would thrill through the bosom of an angel, but you have done nothing to move the heart of man. And you may portray the flames, the blackness, and torments of an eternal hell, so that all heaven would tremble if the description were given there, and you have done nothing to move, arouse, or alarm man. Not a point is gained; not even momentary alarm is excited; nor from the deepest scene of wo and sorrow can the sinner of himself be induced for a moment to turn the eye on the bright fields of glory before him.

We know this is an anomaly; and we feel it—but still it is so. Every where else, except in religion, we have a strong assurance of success when we appeal to men's reason, and conscience, and to their obvious and undeniable interest. Here we have none. They sit unmoved when listening to the most affecting and awful truths of religion; or if moved it is only when they are roused to offer resistance. For any thing that they care, the groans of Calvary might have been prolonged to the end of time; and for any effort which they will make, the harps of salvation might be unstrung forever. They follow the world when they know it will deceive them; they run the round of giddy vanity when they know it is all false and hollow; they listen to the syren voice of pleasure when it has a thousand times betrayed them; they indulge in wild and tumultuous passions when they know they will ruin them; they refuse to return to God when conscience, and reason, and hope, and fear, all prompt them to secure the salvation of the soul. They are haters of God, when they have abundant power to be his friends; degraded slaves to passion, when they might be ennobled freemen; miserable, when they might be happy; troubled, anxious, and sad, when they might be calm; trembling under the dread of death, when they might look on it with triumph; restless, jaded and dissatisfied, when their bosoms might be the abode of peace; and expiring without hope when the dying bed might be irradiated by a flood of glory poured down from heaven. Such is man; and whatever may be said about his *ability*—and much *may* be said—it is still true, always has been true, always will be true, that men “will not come to God that they might have life.” He that goes forth preaching the gospel, or in any other good work, making it the basis of his calculation that men will of themselves be disposed to yield, and become christians, is destined to the same disappointment that Melancthon was. “I thought,” said he, “that I could persuade every man to be a christian; but I found the old Adam too strong for the young Melancthon.” He may see them convinced of the truth of religion under his preaching; silenced by his demonstrations; kept at bay by his undisputed learning or talent, but he will not see them yield the heart to God. He may see them become restless under the truth which he urges; or curling the lip in scorn at some of his positions; or trembling like Felix under his reasonings; or almost converted like Agrippa by his argument; or aroused and wondering like Festus; or grieved like the young man

who had great possessions, but he will see no giving up of the heart to religion. He may minister for decades of years—till preacher and hearer grow grey together—to those who are convinced of the truth of these things, but they will not yield ; or he may see his hearers turning their backs on his ministry, and fleeing from the house of God forever—though convinced that all that he says is true. Such is preaching—arduous, difficult, strange, glorious, Godlike work ! And if these things are so, then the ground of calculation of success is not on what man *will* do, but must be found in a sovereign God.

III. In the third place, I observe, therefore, that the divine sovereignty is a more certain basis of calculation of success in efforts to promote religion, than any thing else is. This might be presented as an *inference* from what has been said, for if we can depend neither on the power, nor the willingness of man, then we have no other basis of hope than in God. But I choose to present it as a separate *argument*. It will thus be a step towards a just conclusion, as well as corroborate what has been said. I observe, then, that you can make no certain calculation on any thing else. This is true in all other things, and it is true also in religion. You cannot calculate with absolute certainty on a continuance of even what are called the laws of nature—the most fixed things of which we have any knowledge—for God has power at any moment to change them. The statesman cannot calculate with certainty how men will act in given circumstances, familiar as he may be with the records of the past ;—for the past has not been observed with sufficient care, and to sufficient extent ; the motives of men have not been sufficiently understood ; the lessons which history *might* teach are not well enough learned ;—or the will, and passions, and prejudices of men come in as a disturbing cause, and disappoint all his sagacious plans and prophecyings—for who can with certainty estimate the power of the human will and human passions as a *disturbing* cause in the execution of his schemes of policy, any more than the mariner can estimate the power of the whirlwind and the tempest in disturbing his voyage ? You cannot calculate with certainty on the return of a richly freighted ship from a distant port, or on a harvest, or on the success of any enterprize—for a thousand disturbing causes come in, which you cannot foresee, to frustrate your plans. Health may fail, or a blight may come over your fields, or the locust may devour, or the palmer worm may consume what he has left, or the wind may blow from some unforeseen quarter, or pirates may swarm on the deep, and all your calculations shall fail. So it is in doing good, and especially in the effort to convert a sinner from the error of his way, and to promote religion in the world, there is nothing *in* man that can be a basis of certain calculation and of hope. The sinner has a conscience ;—but you are by no means certain that he will allow it to perform its proper functions as the vicegerent of God. He may silence its reproofs by direct effort ; he may pervert its decisions by bad philosophy or theology ; or he may indulge in sin till it is seared as with a hot iron. He has an understanding ;—but you are by no means certain

that it will be allowed to perform its just offices. It may be blinded in its views; perverted in its judgments; or directly resisted by the will when it would lead the soul to God. He has a heart;—but you have no security that it will love right things, or that all its affections will not be perverse and ruinous. You have no basis of calculation that when you present a holy object to the human heart it will be loved; none that when the most vile and debasing is presented the affections will not cling and cluster around it. The sinner has a will;—but in religion its decisions are more likely to be wrong than right; they will be certainly wrong, we think, unless the grace of God shall incline to that which is good. The sinner has great interests at stake, and he was so made by his Creator as to be fitted to act in view of them, but you have no evidence that he will do it. He is more likely to seek a gilded bauble than the diadem of glory; and the most worthless gew-gaw, or withering night-shade, this side the grave, has more attractions in his eye, than the infinite riches and the crown incorruptible beyond. If you make a calculation that the sinner will of his own accord suffer the powers of his understanding, and heart, and will, to act in accordance with their lofty nature, and to lead him to God, you will certainly be disappointed. The experience of the world is against you. Thousands, and millions, and hundreds of millions, have lived and died impenitent under all the solemn truths and appeals which you can bring to bear on their hearts, and you have no truth and no power of argument which has not been tried in vain countless numbers of times.

But how can the sovereign power of God be made the basis of calculation of success in efforts to do good? I answer, (1) none of the causes which defeat your plans will affect his. No tempest shall howl from an unforeseen quarter to frustrate his purposes; no blight or mildew shall disappoint his hopes; no obduracy of the human heart, or perverseness of the will, can operate as a disturbing cause to his plans; no loss of health, or life, or change of times, can stay the execution of his fixed schemes. I answer, (2) God has purposes of mercy about the salvation of man which *can* be a basis of calculation. He had at Corinth; he has in reference to every age, and to every land. He meant that the gates of hell shall never prevail against his church; he said that his “word should not return to him void;” he has solemnly sworn that to him “shall every knee bow and every tongue confess.” The Savior said, “other sheep have I which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice;” (John x: 16.) and there are those who were “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love; being predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will,” (Eph. i: 4. 4.) and nothing can prevent their being brought into the kingdom. I answer, (3) the purposes of God are those which contemplate the gathering in of those who shall be saved, in connexion with appropriate human efforts, and especially the preaching of the gospel. It is not by the exertion of independent power; it is not by miracles; it is in con-

nexion with the use of means adapted to the end. And though some may be saved by means and influences which we cannot trace, yet the great law is, that it is in connexion with appropriate efforts that men are to be saved. Beyond those efforts, there is no certain basis of calculation in regard to the salvation of men. Within them, it is limited to the sovereign purpose of God, and were there no such purpose those efforts would be in vain. That purpose lies deep in the Eternal Mind. It has lain there undisturbed from the infinite past. It has been unchanging as suns have risen and set; as kingdoms have been founded and fallen; as human schemes have been formed, modified, and abandoned; as stars have been created and have disappeared. In all these revolutions the mind of God about human salvation has been one—without any new purpose, without any change of place, without any tendency to its being abandoned or defeated. “He doeth according to his pleasure 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.” Dan. iv: 35. “I am God,” says he, “and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are yet to be done, saying, MY COUNSEL SHALL STAND, AND I WILL DO ALL MY PLEASURE.” Isa. xlvi: 10. It is that immutable counsel which constitutes all the basis of calculation for success in doing good in this lost world. And that is enough. *What more desirable basis of calculation CAN there be, than the unchanging purpose of an infinitely benevolent God?*

IV. There is a fourth consideration to which I shall just advert, though the time will not allow me to do the justice to it which I could desire. It is, that the actual exercise of that sovereignty is such as to be an encouragement to effort. In the case of the apostle Paul at Corinth, guilty and wicked as that city was, his success there was such as was fitted to lead him to rely more and more on the sovereign purpose of God to save men. The same was true elsewhere. No man probably ever went forth to an important enterprise under a more abiding conviction of the truth of the doctrine of divine sovereignty than did the apostle Paul. “I have planted,” said he, “and Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.” 1 Cor. iii: 6. 8. “I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” 1 Cor. xv: 10. So the preservation of the church in dark periods; the revivals of religion which have attended the preaching of the gospel; the success which has attended every well formed plan for doing good, all show how much encouragement there is in these efforts to depend on the sovereign mercy of God. Paul himself was arrested when there was no human basis of calculation that would cheer the hearts of a bleeding church that the great persecutor would be converted; and in thousands of similar instances, the infidel chieftain, the persecutor, the scoffer, the profane, the man proud in philosophy and confident in his own righteousness, the man educated, as Paul was, for a different pur-

pose, and with a different plan of life, has been suddenly arrested, humbled, changed by a power which he neither could, nor would then resist, and made to preach that Savior which he had before persecuted. So, too, in the darkest period in the history of the church, clouds have been cleared away; divisions have been healed; the fires of persecution have been put out; kingdoms and men that have opposed the gospel have been destroyed by a sovereign God in a manner which no human calculation could have foretold, and in such a manner that it was seen that it was directly by the finger of the Almighty.

But what I wished particularly to say, was, that the success attending efforts to do good which actually occurs, is just such as to lead men to recognize their dependance, and to trace all to the interposition of a sovereign God. Now, the preacher labors for years apparently in vain, and his message seems like seed scattered on hard rocks; then, the soil seems to be made mellow by some invisible influence and every word takes effect; now, all his arguments, and appeals, and instructions, are disregarded alike by the aged and the young; then, truth so simple as to appear adapted to children, has power to arrest the man of age, and wisdom, and experience, and learning, and turn him to God; now, a whole congregation sit unmoved under an argument of truth; then, all are bowed down under the same truth as a forest bends before the mighty wind; and now, while the mass are unconcerned, the arrow shot at a venture reaches the heart of some poor sinner that came with no special preparation, and, wounded, and writhing with anguish, he comes to God for help. All this is the work of a sovereign God;—our encouragement to effort; our argument for his agency; our demonstration of the truth of the great doctrines of grace; and the stay of our souls when we seem to labor in vain, and to spend our strength for nought. And I presume that every minister of the gospel when he looks back on his ministry to learn from the past what are the real grounds of his encouragement in his work, looks instinctively to such manifestations of the power of a sovereign God.—The argument which I designed to submit is now before you. Among the lessons which it teaches are the following.

1. The true nature of the sinner's dependance on God. All men are ready philosophically to admit that they are dependent on their Creator, but this doctrine is so held as to produce no practical effect on the mind. The sinner will admit that he is dependent for life, and health, and reason, and strength, and favorable junctures for the prosecution of his plans, as all men are. In common with all the race, also, he is dependent on God for the offer of mercy, and the knowledge that there is a way of salvation, and for the arrangements which God has made, and which were beyond the power of man. But the point of most immediate interest in this matter is, that he is dependent on God to do what he *could* himself do, but *will* not do; what he is under the most sacred obligation to accomplish, but what, such is his determined wickedness, he never *will* accomplish. He is dependent on his Maker for a disposition to love him; to attend to his own interests; to feel

feel compunctions of guilt where he has done wrong; to take one step in securing his own salvation. In a matter of the plainest obligation, and where the power is ample, he will never think a right thought, or have a right feeling, or be influenced by a right motive to all eternity, unless he is led to it by a God whom he hates, and whose agency he scorns and rejects. And hence,

2. We may see the nature of human wickedness. It is so deep in the soul; so fixed and determined in its character, that man never will be or can be led to do right without the intervention of the mighty power of God. There are no human means that will overcome it. There is no power of argument or persuasion; no regard to his own real happiness in this world, or to his immortal destiny in the next; no pleadings of affection, that will induce the sinner to break off from his sins, and return to his Maker. Man is endowed with an understanding, but in religion he will not follow its dictates; he has a conscience, but he resists its decisions and promptings; he has a will, but it is perverse and obstinate; he is capable of affection, but his heart is attached to improper things, and he will not love his Maker; he has interests of infinite value at stake, but he will not think of them or regard them; he is going to hell, and will not be warned to avoid it; he might go to heaven, but there is nothing that will induce him to seek its glories. The simple reason for this conduct, so strange—so passing strange—is, the wickedness of the heart. And that wickedness is no slight matter which will lead an immortal soul thus to make itself everlastingly wretched; and which resists all the arguments and appeals, which even *God* can place before the mind, rather than forsake it.

3. We see what is the prospect about the salvation of the sinner. The whole question is lodged in the bosom of a sovereign God; and it will be just as he decides. If an influence descends from heaven you will be saved. If not, you will not be. There is no other power to save men; and we frankly and most kindly say to you, one and all, that our hope of your conversion is not in any native tendency to goodness which we believe you to possess, or any inclination which you have to do right, or any belief that you will of yourselves ever be any more disposed to attend to your salvation than you are now. Nor is it in any expectation that appeals can be made to your understanding, or conscience, or heart, or will, or self-interest, that will induce you of yourselves to come to God. We have learned not to preach with any such vain and illusive expectation as that. Our hope is in that sovereign God who by his own power converted Saul of Tarsus, and Augustine, and Bunyan, and John Newton, and Col. Gardner, and all the infidels, and scoffers, and gay triflers, who have ever gone to glory, or are on their way; and we believe the question of your salvation is lodged solely in the bosom of that sovereign. Mysterious secret! Lodged and buried there in a heart into which no mortal looks and which no mortal controls! Dread Sovereign! The destiny of all hangs on thee! If so, then,

4. We see where our encouragement lies—how ministers should preach, and how christians should labor for the salvation of their fellow men. We should not be discouraged. We should not feel that sin will finally prevail. We should not fear that a torn and bleeding church will be extinct. We should not feel that wickedness is to triumph in the earth, nor that all that are now wicked will go down to hell. Every thing may seem to dishearten us. In our spheres of labor there may be all the embarrassments that opposed the gospel when first preached. There may be all the prejudice that led the Jews to reject it; all the love of gain that opposed it at Ephesus; all the pride of philosophy that met it at Athens; and all the profligacy adapted to sicken the soul of the Apostle at Corinth, but there is the same God to carry forward the triumphs of the gospel; and in reference to a wicked world we may hear him say, “Be not afraid, for I am with thee, speak and hold not thy peace;” and is it fancy or the faith of fanaticism that seems to hear him say to each minister and each christian, “no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city?” In the great work in which we are engaged let us then direct our eyes and our hearts to the Great Sovereign to whose mercy are to be traced all our own hopes of salvation. There *are* things which man cannot perform in the matter of religion; there are things which, though he *might* perform them he will not; there is no certain basis of calculation in our appeals to the understandings or the hearts of men, but there *is* in the plans of divine sovereignty, and our own experience has taught us so. The world is wicked. Our friends are unconcerned about their salvation. Our kindred, and partners, and parents, and children, are regardless of their welfare in the future world, and nothing arouses them to ask the way to life. Whither shall we go? Where shall we look for help? Where can we find a solid rock of hope in our efforts? In the hope that God will mercifully interpose where *we* have no power, and that he will diffuse joy through our souls by their conversion when our hearts are ready to sink within us. Our place is at the feet of that Great Sovereign where we found mercy for our own souls—and there let us lie and plead, with strong crying and tears, in behalf of Zion, until “the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.”

5. Finally, my brethren in the ministry will recognize in the doctrine of this discourse nothing but what has come home a thousand times with peace and consolation to their own hearts. In the hours of our sadness and despondency—and they are many—when we feel that our preaching does good to no one, and that the word of truth seems to fall on the hard rock—we have had no where else to look for encouragement but to the high purposes of the God whom we serve. Then we have felt, that however man might receive the message, all is fixed and certain with Him who has called us into the ministry. What though the purpose be concealed from us, and we have no power to penetrate the secret counsels in JEHOVAH’S mind; what though in our efforts we could not tell which would prosper whether this or that; and what

though we had no power to move the Eternal Arm to rescue the soul from death, yet our souls have been stayed with the unshaken belief that God *means* to save men, and that those "whom he has ordained to eternal life" will believe. *Then God has blessed us.* When we have felt this truth most deeply, then we were most strong, and most blessed. The soul never feels it so much as in the thrilling scenes of a revival of religion; and men never preach with so much power and so much success, as when they lie low before God, and feel that the whole question respecting the salvation of their hearers is lodged with him. Then mighty obstacles yield; "the mountains and hills are made low, and the rough places plain. The glory of the Lord is revealed, and all flesh see it together." In the great work to which God has called us in the field which he has appointed us to occupy; amidst all the obstacles which *we* have to meet from the love of gain, the prevalence of unbelief, the self-confidence of philosophy, the gaiety, the fashion, and the vanity of the world; and in all the obstructions which we may ever meet from the opposition of erring brethren, our hope of success is in the sovereign power of God. If our counsels and plans are formed with confidence in Him they will not fail; if resting on our own wisdom and strength, we shall find them again, as we have often found them to our sorrow, formed in vain.