

SOVEREIGNTY

A SERMON

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“What If God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?” Romans 9:22

THE original principle thrown into the mind of man by the great enemy of our souls; namely, that of substituting the sovereignty of the creature for the sovereignty of God, is a principle that shows itself everywhere; and as Satan originally planted that principle, God alone can eradicate it; God alone can undo what Satan did. Hence, Christ came to destroy the works of the devil; and this is the original, and I may say the root of all the works of the devil, in putting the sovereignty of the creature into the place of the sovereignty of the Creator; in putting his own Satanic falsehood into the place of God’s eternal truth; and hereby the enemy has assimilated man to himself; so that as Satan is a liar and a murderer, so by nature is every man; “Let God be true, and every man a liar.” And as every man is thus a liar against his Maker, he is also a murderer. There was not one unregenerate man, not one unsanctified soul, that was not willing that Christ should be put to death, it was only those who were partakers of discriminating grace, which had delivered them from their blindness and their state by nature, they were the persons that consented not to the counsel and deed of them that crucified Jesus. And so that which fell upon the Savior has from his day personally on earth to the present day fallen more or less upon his truth and upon his people. Such then is the powerful working of this direful principle of advocating human sovereignty in opposition to the sovereignty of God; that sovereignty which is essential to our eternal salvation. At the same time, of course, we reverentially and tremblingly acknowledge that there is a deep in the sovereignty of God, especially in that part of it we have this morning to attend to, that is altogether unfathomable; but it is put upon record by every prophet that ever lived, and by all the apostles, and by the Lord himself. Point me to one prophet that treated the sovereignty of God lightly; point me to one apostle that treated the sovereignty of God lightly; point me to one part of the Savior’s doctrine, in which he treated the sovereignty of God lightly. It was a matter of great solemnity with them all; and so, it will be with us if we are taught of the blessed God.

I shall notice our text under the following four-fold form. First, *the sin of men in fitting themselves for destruction*; secondly, *the counsel of God*; “God willing to show his wrath;” third, *the certainty of that counsel*, “to make his power known;” there is the certainty; fourth, and lastly, *the order of that counsel*, “endured with much long suffering.”

First: First, THE SIN OF MEN IN FITTING THEMSELVES FOR DESTRUCTION. The margin reads, "made up for destruction." The original word is a very solemn word, and fuller perhaps than the word by which our translators have rendered it; the original word signifies "perfect," "made perfect;" which would be explained by such a scripture as this; "The filling up of the measure of their iniquity." But it is for me first to describe how man is fitted for destruction. There is a two-fold sense in which man is fitted for destruction; the first is *legally*, and the second is *personally*. First in the legal sense. The Lord, gave what law he pleased to Adam; but when that law was once given, it became the rule of life and death. The Lord sovereignly gave ten commandments; he might have given the whole ten in one, or he might have extended the ten to a thousand; but he was pleased sovereignly to give the ten. He gave that law in sovereignty; he was under no necessity; he did just as he pleased; but when that law was once given, it became a rule of life and death. Now we are assured from the word of the Lord that the wages of sin is death; and it appears to lie in that which I have before defined, and I will give it again, that the wages of sin being death appears to lie in this one thing, the setting aside of the blessed God, apostasy from him; therein lies the root of all sin. Hence, Christ is represented as taking away the sin of the world; the original sin, on behalf of all that were given to Christ, he took away; so that their apostasy is by his mediation eternally destroyed. But let me come to our legal fitness for destruction. "The wages of sin is death." And I must look at this first originally, for the original word means "perfect." So, our fitness for destruction was perfected by the fall; for we are told that by one man's disobedience many became sinners; so that by the fall of Adam every man, by virtue of union to Adam, oneness with Adam, federal relation to Adam, every man by that came under the curse, came under wrath, came under eternal condemnation. There it was perfect. And if it were possible that successive generations should be born, and live in this world as many years as you might name, and during all those years not commit a single fault but be conscientious, so that you shall not detect a single moral wrong about them, yet even that would not alter the fact, nor contribute one iota towards altering their state; they are, independent of anything they have personally done, under sin, under the law, under death, under wrath, under condemnation; and thus all by nature are vessels of wrath, fitted, without merit, for destruction. It is a righteous thing with God, then, to condemn on the ground of the violation of his own eternal law. Here then their condemnation, even going no farther, is perfect; all by nature vessels of wrath; not in the sense intended in our text, but in the sense the apostle expresses it when he says, "We are by nature children of wrath, even as others." It is not true that any man has lived free from sin; all have committed sin personally; and all do commit sin; the most consistent man under the whole canopy of heaven, when tested by the straight and perfect rule of God's eternal law, is sure to commit sin; there is no such thing as living without it. Take only that one commandment, for instance, or that one clause rather, which was brought home to the mind of the apostle; "Thou shalt not covet." Is there a man or a woman in this assembly this morning that can say that you always feel perfectly satisfied and contented with what you have, and a perfection of gratitude for what you have? that you never look upon something you do not possess with any desire whatever to have it; that you can think of gold, and silver, and wealth, and honor, without the slightest desire to possess them? You know we dare not say this. So far from this being the case, is it not just the reverse? And even when we are spiritually minded, when Christ is precious, and our minds are busied about eternal things, even then do we not feel something trying to tear us away from that foundation, trying to tear us away from looking at God in his love, away from the Lord Jesus Christ, and away from spiritual things? Have we not felt the solemn truth described by the apostle, when he says, "I see another law in my members;" as though he were standing in one place as a Christian, and seeing himself standing there as a sinner; I can

see that law, I can see that power; there it is with its sins, full of malice against my new man; there it is, with its hands full of chains, ready to bind my new man; "I see another law in my members, bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." If then this be true of a just man, how much more of an unjust, if it be true, "There is not a just man that does good, and sins not," how much truer is it of men universally in their state by nature; while they know not God, nor obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. So that men, by their original sin and their personal sins, are under the law, under the curse, under wrath, and are justly condemned. And I can find that justice only on two things; first on the sovereignty of God in giving any law that he thought proper, for he was bound by no external rule whatever; and then secondly, that it is just because having given that law, which is just because he gave it, mind that, therefore it is a matter of justice that he should maintain that law which he has thus sovereignly given; and every jot and tittle of that law shall be maintained to all eternity, in the endless sufferings of those that shall be lost, and shall suffer as long as the authority of the law shall last; and the authority of the law will last as long as God himself lasts, for he is the authority of the law, consequently the fire cannot be quenched, nor can the worm die; it is indeed a most fearful scene of things. Let me here just look for one moment, if this be truth that I have been asserting, which it certainly is, oh, how this makes way for the coming in of the Lord Jesus Christ! My hearer, that man, whether it be when first called by grace, or whether it be a truth which the Lord is pleased some years after, as is very often the case, to make him acquainted with, that man that is acquainted with what the law of God really is, and where as a sinner he is by that law, that is the man that will prize the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ; he will cleave to the name of Jesus, he will cleave to his righteousness, to the perfection of that righteousness, to the perfection of that sacrifice; he will cleave to the certainty of the promises that are confirmed by that sacrifice. Ah, he will say, I speak now of the man who finds this out after some years' experience, he will say, When first convinced of sin, I saw I was a sinner, felt I was a lost sinner, and knew that I needed a Savior; but I saw not then one half of the awfulness of the state I was in; that I have seen since; it is the gospel that has told me where I was by the law; it is the gospel that has brought me life and light, that has anointed my eyes with eye salve again and again; and the more I look back at my Adam fall, the more I look at my sin-bondage, the more I look at my state by nature, the more I see that it would indeed have been a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; the more clearly I see what a fearful condition I was in and the more clearly I see the stupendous love of Him that could send his Son to take my awful position; and the more clearly I see the amazing love of Him that could love a poor worm like me; and take the curse, the hell, the wrath due to me; and not only so, but take me also into the bosom of his love, and engage in his eternal Suretyship responsibility, to see me safe through life, and safe through death, and present me at last in all the triumphs of his righteousness, and with his sacrificial perfection. Oh, how can I love a God like this enough! How can I exalt a Savior like this enough! How can I speak well enough of that Divine Teacher, that Eternal Spirit, that has left so many thousands where I once was, and where I still should have been, but for God's absolute sovereignty in embracing me in his love, and not appointing me unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ? Men then are demeritively fitted for destruction; sin deserves it, and they deserve it by sin; on the other hand, seeing this is our state, there can be no escape but by him who is the Mediator; and there can be no escape by him only in the perfection of his work. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Man is therefore, blind to what God really is; he is shut up in unbelief, shut up in enmity. If a natural man got to heaven, he could not be happy there, because his enmity would go with him; and he would do there as angels once did, he would fall, being a carnal man. Can he be happy even now in the church below? Can he join with the saints in their soul-troubles,

in their realizations of mercy? Can he join with them to speak of the Savior's name as ointment poured forth? The man is not fitted for it; he is not at home there at all. What is he fitted for? He is fitted for hell, for the company of devils, with whom he can join to blaspheme; he can join with them in malice against God; he can join with them in everything that is hellish and devilish. Therefore, man in this personal sense also, is fitted for destruction; he is not fit for anything else. How many delusions are there abroad upon the matter of fitness for heaven? Your works fit you for heaven! Your repentance fit you for heaven! No! Come to the Savior's declaration, "You must be born again;" nothing short of this conviction of what we are; nothing short of the slaying of this enmity, bringing us out of this blindness, and bringing us into reconciliation with God, can fit us for heaven. "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Can you say that you have been brought to feel your need of that part of the line of life: to be conformed to the image of his Son? What is the image of his Son? "He has perfected forever all them that are sanctified;" that is the image, and you must be conformed to it. That is the true holiness, and that is the true righteousness. What do you say to that? And whom he did predestinate, to be thus conformed to holiness and righteousness by the eternally perfect offering of Christ, "he also called;" left not a particle of it with man; called you; made you feel discontented with what you were, and where you were; some of you brought like Saul of Tarsus; others of you like Lydia, brought gradually along; but all brought to renounce all confidence in the flesh; and to receive the love of the truth. "Them he also justified;" can you say you are at home in that? The same people he also "glorified." Why, if the professing world were tested by this line of truth, how many would stand it? Very few. In my time, I have read a great many duty-faith men's sermons, or a great many duty-faith sermons; and one thing has struck me very powerfully in reading them; it is this, that the farther off these men are in their sermons from God's truth, the more they are at home, the more liberty they have, the more comfortably they preach; but when they now and then, in order to delude us with the notion that they are Calvinists and free grace men, when they now and then hammer out, and stammer out, and labor out, and work out with great difficulty a high and dry doctrinal sermon, oh dear, what cold work it is; their zeal dwindles to a spark. Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also; and if I am a lover of lies, I shall be at home in those lies, and especially if they are lies buttered with piety; their words will be then softer and smoother than oil; but they are nothing but lies still. On the other hand, if I am a lover of the truth, I shall be at home there, happy there, comfortable there, and nowhere else. Enmity and love are the two contrastive principles that run all through the Scriptures; the enemy, the man that hates the truth, is an enemy, though he may come with all the excellencies of an angel from heaven; he comes with another gospel, he is an enemy, though he put on the garb of a friend; he is a wolf, though he puts on sheep's clothing. On the other hand, the man that loves the truth, though he may have the faults of Noah, or Peter, or David, still he is a good man in spite of those faults, he is a friend; the others are enemies in spite of their excellencies.

Second: Having made these few remarks, I go next to THE COUNSEL OF GOD. "What if God, willing to show his wrath?" There appear to me two purposes the great God had in view in suffering the fall of angels and of men: the one purpose was that expressed in our text, that he might show his wrath on the ground of their sins. This was one end he had in view; he intended there should be a hell, he intended to show his wrath; he intended that angels and men should suffer eternally on the ground of their sins. Mind this, his decree here rests upon their sins; he is in no shape or form whatever the author of their sins, but he is the author of the penalty due to sin; it laid with him to appoint what penalty he pleased. Hence, in Job, after pointing out the judgments of God,

“This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God.” “God has made all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil.” Oh, this is unfathomable! what a deep truth is this! Those of you who do not believe God’s word concerning this, why, you admit there is a hell, you admit that some are there, and that it is fire that is never quenched, that it is everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. Then why, admitting that part of God’s truth, do you deny the other? namely, that God never intended such persons to be in heaven, he never intended them to be anywhere else? The other purpose for which he suffered the fall is expressed in the next verse, as well as in other scriptures, “And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.” Here then, man has by his sin fitted himself for destruction; but man has not by his works fitted himself for salvation; no. There is the distinction in the language; I am willing to admit it; that the vessels of mercy he has before prepared, that is, provided them; when? “From before the foundation of the world.” They were chosen in Christ, given to Christ, and he never refused them, and never will; and they will never be taken from him, nor he ever taken from them. “What if God, willing,” They were chosen in Christ, given to Christ, and he never refused them and never will; and they will never be taken from him, nor he taken from them. “What if God, willing,” you, a little piece of clay! Ah, but, say some, clay has no feeling. I know that; and the natural man has no feeling for God’s truth, no right feeling; he has no right feeling for God’s Christ; no right feeling for God’s people. Here is the contrast then. Ah, but then, if this be so, it is of no use to strive. That it is not; that is just what I am aiming at this morning; if any of you are striving, I am trying to stop it, to show you it is of no use. That’s discouraging, say you. Just what I want, to discourage you; I want to stop you; I want to see you leave off your formalities, your prayer-books, your empty doings, and fall down at the footstool of God’s mercy; and to make you feel that it is not of you that will, nor of you that run, but of God that shows mercy; and then as soon as you leave off this empty, deluded striving, you will turn your head another way, you will view God in another light altogether; you will be humbled deeply in the dust, you will become nothing; and that will be a sign and token that you are among his people. All the time you are striving to make matters right in a way contrary to his sovereignty, you are striving to accomplish what you can never do. It is God’s counsel, then, that angels shall for their sins eternally suffer; it is God’s counsel that a part of the human race shall be vessels of wrath; and he has determined who they shall be; he has not left the matter with man; no, no. “Esau have I hated;” that is the man; I have constituted him the object of my hatred. “Jacob have I loved;” neither done good nor evil. God, in the exercise of his sovereignty, fixed upon which should be saved, and which should be lost; it cannot be altered; these two mountains of brass eternally stand, unshaken, immoveable; men may nibble, and kick, and turn, and twist, and abuse their Maker; but they will never overturn his eternal truth. No less in this chapter, than six great and prominent arguments, into which I cannot now enter, to show up this very truth, that God has settled the matter, who shall and who shall not. A six-fold aspect he gives of this. First, that of Isaac and Ishmael; God determined who should be the child of promise. Second, Jacob and Esau; God settled the matter. Third, in his testimony to Moses, “I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy; I will have compassion upon whom I will.” The fourth aspect is that of Pharaoh, “For this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.” The fifth is that of the potter and his clay and the sixth, is the substitution of the Gentiles for the Jews. That is the Apostle’s train of argument, to show that God has eternally settled the matter who shall be saved and who shall be lost. It is of no use mincing the matter: talking to men as though they could be saved if they will; talking to men as though God Almighty was very unhappy because men will not be

saved; confounding a temporal dispensation with an eternal. Why, the temporal dispensation, where God expostulated with men, the object of that dispensation was not eternal, and therefore, no means were used corresponding with its being eternal; but the objects the Gospel has in view are eternal; and consequently, we have in that the Spirit in his eternity, Christ in his eternity, God the Father in his eternity. Where the object is eternal, there the means are eternal. The damnation of the sinner is eternal; sin is the criminal cause, and the law is the legal cause; the sovereignty of God the executive cause; it lies with God. Sin is the criminal cause; the law the legal cause; the sovereignty of God the executive cause. There the matter stands; the justice of God in the damnation of the lost.

Third. Then comes THE CERTAINTY: "That he might make his power known." That is, in that way. He might have converted the whole world, instead of drowning them; but that was not his will; he was pleased to make his power known in his wrath, and not in his mercy. He could have converted the cities of the plain instead of burning them; and he might have damned you instead of saving you; mind that, do not forget that. If you have hard thoughts of God this morning while I am speaking to you, do not forget that; I speak now to the real Christian, who may nevertheless, feel a little objection to what I am saying; remember that he *could* have *damned, you instead of saving you*; and therefore, it does not become you to say anything against his majesty, or sovereignty, or power. The Lord help you to put your mouth in the dust, and stand fast by that discriminating grace which has exempted you from the sword, and saved you. He might have converted the Egyptians instead of drowning them, he could have done so. He could have converted the ancient nations instead of letting them walk on to destruction. He could have converted the whole Jewish nation as easily as only some thousands among them. And when a minister preaches a sermon, and there are three or four souls converted, if the minister were preaching to ten thousand instead of one thousand, God could convert the whole if he pleased to do so; but he does not do so, because he will not: "He has mercy upon whom he will have mercy; and whom he will he hardens." Hence, the world must be drowned, the cities of the plain must be destroyed. Ah, but, say you, he offered them a kind of chance. We shall come to that directly. The Jewish nation, he could have converted them; and so, the whole world now; but he does not do so. Why not? Because there is a people in whose condemnation, he will make his wrath and power eternally known; his power shall be employed to maintain every iota of his holy law and every thunderbolt of his word shall be carried to its object; every judgment must stand eternally good. I here throw in a gospel observation; it is this, looking at matters in this way, just look at Jesus Christ. He stood in the certainty of the curse; hear his solemn words, perhaps in all the Bible there are not words more solemn, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But, no; there was an omnipotent arm uplifted to wield the sword of justice; he is the Shepherd and the Surety, and escape that sword he cannot; there is an eternal certainty about it; he endured it; it was sure to come.

Forth. But lastly, I come to THE ORDER; "endured with much longsuffering." The long suffering of the blessed God has in the Scriptures a twofold aspect, one in relation to the ungodly, the other in relation to the godly. First, Noah was a preacher of righteousness; and by him the Holy Ghost in the way of a testimony strove with man for the reformation of the world; and God gave them, all the time the ark was building, space to repent; and had the old world have repented, as they ought to have done as rational, moral, and responsible beings, then the Flood would not have come. The Lord gave Ahab space to repent, and he did repent, and deferred the judgment. He gave the

Ninevites an opportunity to repent, and they did repent, and their city was spared. Jesus Christ gave the Jewish nation forty years in which to repent but they did not repent, and therefore, the judgment came. If I am speaking this morning to an ungodly man, an enemy to any of God's people, he has given you space to repent, and if you repent, then temporal judgment may not cut you off; but if you do not repent, but go on just as you are, you will fill up your measure; and then presently some judgment, unlooked for by you, in a way you never dreamed of, will hurl you in the twinkling of an eye into the lowest hell. That is the aspect that the long-suffering of the blessed God bears towards the ungodly. Ah, but then, say you, the Holy Spirit strove. Give me an instance in all God's book wherein the Holy Ghost ever strove to convert a soul; he never did such a thing, never. Give me one instance wherein the Father, wherein the Savior, wherein the Holy Ghost, ever strove to convert a soul and bring him to God. Never, never. Striving implies a difficulty, and a possible failure. Did the Lord Jesus Christ strive to convert Saul of Tarsus? did the Lord Jesus Christ strive to raise the dead Lazarus? did the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost strive to prick the people in their hearts? Oh no, he comes in the universality of his power, takes hold of the dry bones, and there is a great shaking among them; he brings them together, lays sinews upon them; clothes them with flesh, and covers them with skin, breaths into them, they stand upon their feet an exceeding great army; they stand upon the vantage ground of conquests and victory. Did the Holy Spirit strive? No no; no such term as that is ever used in connexion with the conversion of a soul. As well may you tell me that Jesus Christ will strive to get us out of the grave at the last day. The striving of the blessed Spirit, therefore, will mean simply the Spirit working in Noah, and striving by Noah for the reformation of the world; but what has that to do with matters that pertain to eternal salvation? Then the other aspect of the long suffering of the blessed God is in relation to his people. Oh, what will he not endure for the sake of his people? Look at his long suffering in the days of Noah; the chief reason of his long suffering after all was that the Ark might be finished, and Noah saved. And if there had been ten good people found in the cities of the plain, God, for the sake of those ten would have borne with the wickedness of all the rest; there is love for you, those of you that know his name. So, in the Jewish nation; could there have been retained within its bosom real Christians enough to have warded off the judgment, it would have been done; but they persecuted them to the uttermost, every man and woman that professed the truth as it was in Christ Jesus. I should have liked, but space forbids, to have shown the opposite effects that this testimony of God's sovereignty has upon opposite characters. The ungodly man says, this is awful to the last degree; I will never go and hear that man again. There we see the truth, "whom he will be hardens." And I could never love such a God as that. That shows what you are. The duty-faith man says, well, I believe that to a certain extent; but it ought not to be said much about. Sir, I ask you in the name of common sense, in the name of the church, in the name of angels, in the name of the great God, whether the Bible be a private or a public book? Oh, say you, a public book. Well then, if God had recorded these solemn matters in some private book, and if there had been a conclave of persons chosen by the Lord, and they had received communications from him, as the Cardinals at Rome, the blasphemous wretches, pretend they have; that they have certain oral traditions which have been specially communicated by the Holy Ghost to the church, for them to deal out as matters may require; if such a thing existed, there would be some force in the argument that these things ought not to be made prominent. The Bible is every man's birthright; it is a public book, and God intended it to be so; and if these things be in the Bible, as they most certainly are, we must speak them out. Then what is the effect this will have upon the child of God? It will humble him deeply into the dust; and it will lead him to take the more earnest heed to that Gospel by which he is saved; it will give him a deep sense of discriminating grace, it will make him

worship the Savior, cleave to him, walk in his way, and glory in his name. Some say, Ah, these doctrines lead to sin. Perhaps they lead you to it; if you so hate them that they drive you to it, we have nothing to do with that; we know the effect they have upon us; they endear the Savior,