

Sovereignty of God

A SERMON – Preached on Sunday Morning, September 30th, 1866, by

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He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee."-Psalm 81, 16.

HERE are lost blessings, and the Lord laments over the people's disobedience in losing these blessings, saying, "Oh that my people had harkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies." And the haters of the Lord must have been made to submit, while these people should have continued forever; that is, as long as that dispensation should last. I shall therefore, this morning, take a threefold view of my text. First, the sovereignty of God, in order to explain this subject of lost blessings. Secondly, the sovereignty of God in placing his new covenant people on a different footing. Thirdly, the meaning of my text in detail.

First then, that the sovereignty of God alone can explain clearly unto us this subject of the lost blessings. We live in a day when men seem very much afraid to admit the proper sovereignty of God; and some have said that some people go so far with divine sovereignty as to exclude human responsibility; where as human responsibility is the produce of divine sovereignty. Now then the matter stands thus, -and I shall try to use very clear, at the same time very decisive language. The great God has been pleased to put the creature he has created upon that footing that seems good in his sight. He created angels, and the angels that are fallen were as much his creatures as the angels that are not fallen; yet he was pleased to put one part of the angels upon a conditional footing; he saw that they would fall, and yet he in his sovereignty, put them upon that footing, and they did fall, and are fallen. God is in no way the author of their sin, or the influence to their sin; but he did in sovereignty place them in that condition, while they themselves, whatever might have been the precise nature of their doing, they themselves acted voluntarily in their fall. Divine sovereignty then explains this. God so placed them and made them responsible. In the next place, he sovereignly placed Adam in the Garden of Eden upon a conditional footing. He could have placed him upon an unconditional footing; he could have placed him upon a footing as firm as that occupied by the saints that I shall presently have to notice; he could have placed him upon a footing as firm as that of unfallen angels. But God in his sovereignty was pleased to place Adam upon a conditional footing and made Adam responsible by the law which he gave to him. Adam thus stood responsible to his Maker where his Maker had sovereignly placed him. The Lord did not so place Adam because it is right that he should so place him, but it was right because God did it. God did not create creatures at all because it was right, or that he was under any obligation to create them, but it is right because he has done it. God did not create this globe because he was under any obligation to create it, or that it was right that it should be created, but it is right because he hath done it. And so, he placed Adam upon that footing, while at the same time he had no hand whatever

in Adam's sin. Adam sinned under the influence of Satan; Satan is the source of sin; he is a liar from the beginning, a murderer, and the father of lies. Thirdly- and that's the point we wish to come to, the Lord placed the Jews upon a conditional footing. He gave them certain laws and statutes, all summed up in these two:- "Hear, O Israel: The Lord thy God is one God: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy strength, with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." Now these people from time to time apostatized from this state of things and the Lord again and again laments their apostasy, and says, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, that he should die: turn ye turn ye, O house of Israel; why will ye die?" "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so, iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" And again, "Oh that my people had harkened unto me! Then had their peace been as a river, and their righteousness as the waves of the sea. But the Lord said, "They would none of me. Therefore, I gave them up unto their own hearts desires," their desires being after other gods: "and they walked in their own counsels." Now let me try to make a point clear here which appears to me to be of vast importance. The Lord says, "Oh that my people had harkened unto me!" Was the Lord sincere in that? Yes; but I will presently explain how he was sincere in that. Because you would naturally say, Well, but if the Lord lamented their apostasy, if he would rather they should turn and live, if he would rather that they should believe in him, and keep with him, and walk in prosperity, instead of subjecting them to these penalties, why did he not put them upon a footing in which they were sure to do so? There comes the difficulty; there comes the secret, which I hope to make clear, because it is a very important point. And I will try to make it clear thus. There are two persons; both these persons are servants. You put one of these servants upon a certain footing in your service, for all are God's servants, the other you adopt as your son, and you win his affection; for "he that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length." You win the affection of this servant, you adopt him, and make him one, as far as creatures can do so, of the family; he is held as heir to your estate, and he is taken under your peculiar care; he is educated, and is every way treated differently from the other. Now you wish your servant well, you wish him well, and if that servant does not do well you can with consistency express your grief at it, your regret at it. Well, but why have you not put him upon the same footing as you did the other? Because I was not pleased to do so. I will put that one upon that footing; I see he will not do well, but nevertheless I shall place him there. There is sovereignty. God does therefore say, I would rather you should turn and live; but at the same time, he does not choose to put such on the other footing. Just so this servant. You say, Well, I wish him well; there is the rule if he does well. As the Lord said to Cain, there is a similar idea; "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" not accepted to eternal glory, for that would make eternal glory depend upon the creature's doing; but you shall be accepted as one of my creatures, and you shall enjoy the happy consequence of conformity to the law under which you are. But the Lord was not pleased to adopt Cain and make him a son; the Lord was not pleased to adopt Ishmael and make him a son, to adopt the Jews in Christ Jesus, in the way that he has his own people. Now, then, take this view of the matter: that God was pleased to place the Jews upon such footing, and that while he wished them well, exhorted them, and delighted to see them do well, yet he did not, in the exercise of his sovereignty, choose to put them upon a footing that should secure their well-doing. Well, now, if this be true, which it certainly is, for here is the sovereignty of God in so placing them, -then, "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" what has that to do with the calling of sinners from death to life? and the "rather that you should turn and live;" what has that to do with the new covenant or the calling in of sinners by the regenerating power of God? "Cast away all

your transgressions” -what has that to do with the gospel set forth in the atonement of Christ that puts away sin? And the man that is righteous, he shall enjoy the consequences of his righteousness, and when he turns from righteousness to unrighteousness, then all the penalties of that covenant shall come upon him; but what has that to do with salvation matters? Men run about the world with, "Why will ye die?" and "Why will ye die?"-Men are already dead. It is not applicable spiritually to a son or daughter of Adam under heaven. God was pleased to put them upon that footing, and to give them good laws and statutes, but he was not pleased to put them upon a footing that should secure them infallibly against the penalties they brought upon themselves by their apostasy from him. Now even the low doctrine men that say we go too far with the sovereignty of God, and that we make the sovereignty, of God absorb the responsibilities of man, which I shall show very differently presently, even they can admit the sovereignty of God when it suits them. I will give you an instance where they all admit the sovereignty of God to a man; at the same time, they do it for the sake of explaining a scripture I will presently mention, although I myself do not there exactly see with them. I think their explanation of the following scripture is defective; I think there is another reason which does not perhaps strike their minds in that scripture, namely, that "if these mighty works had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have continued to this day;" that those cities would have repented and would have been preserved. Now, say our low doctrine people, how is it that God omitted to send the Savior to a people that would repent, and sent him to a people that would not repent? Now they like their explanation, like the rest of us, and they say that we can settle this question only by the sovereignty of God; that God was pleased in his sovereignty not to send the Savior to a people that would repent, but in his sovereignty sent him to a people he knew would not repent. Well, there they admit the sovereignty of God; though you and I have another reason. We look into that scripture a little farther, we think that the reason he was not sent to those cities was because he had no people to take out from among them, and we think the reason he was sent to the Jews was because there was a people among them: that the Lord had to take out from the midst of them. Eternal election, therefore, explains to us how it was the Savior was sent to the one and not to the other. I suppose of all the cities of ancient Greece there was no city so sunk, revoltingly sunk in everything villainous and vile as was the city of Corinth; and yet the Lord said to Paul, "Fear not Paul: for I have much people in this city." Why, it is the last thing, perhaps, the apostle would have thought. He would have said, Satan is so rampant here, this is such a quagmire, this is such a marshy place; it is degraded with a tenfold degradation. For all who are the least acquainted with the classic history, well know that it is corrupting to the youthful mind to read the horrid degradations of that ancient city of Greece. And yet, "I have much people in this city." So, the apostles might well say of them afterwards, "Such were some of you," when looking at what had been their state: "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Thus, then, God has, in his sovereignty, placed persons under certain responsibility, and he holds them responsible, according to his own will, according to his own appointment. If we take the sovereignty of God, we must admit this one thing. I say he could have placed angels where they could not have fallen; but he was not pleased to do so; there is his sovereignty. He could have placed Adam where he could not have fallen, but he was not pleased to do so; there is his sovereignty. He could have placed the Jews where they could not apostatize, but he was not pleased to do so; there again is his sovereignty. And he held the angels responsible by the law under which he put them; he held Adam and Eve (and Adam as the federal head, including the whole human race) responsible according to the law under which he placed them. He held the Jews responsible also to the law under which he placed them.

Thus, then, our text contains the temporal blessings of the temporal covenant, which these people would have had and enjoyed if they had not apostatized; but they did apostatize. God expresses a kind of lament over this. But then for the Savior to weep over Jerusalem, to see their stubbornness in not coming into the temporal covenant, to weep over them, and at the same time leave them where he found them, to do this, and to come and shed his blood for his sheep, and gather them in, bring them in by his almighty power, without asking them whether they will come, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring,"-these are two very different things. What has this temporal covenant, and God's lamentation in this temporal covenant, to do with salvation matters? Why, the two are as distinct as night and day, as distinct as the creature and the Creator, as distinct as time and eternity; they stand upon entirely different grounds. Any man, I do not care who he is, that holds the sovereignty of God in a way that makes God the author of sin, that man is in a dreadful error, a dangerous error, a God insulting error. Nothing can emanate from a holy God but holiness; nothing can emanate from a righteous God but righteousness; nothing can emanate from pure Deity but purity; nothing can emanate from him that is not like himself. I detest and abhor the thought for a single moment of uniting God and the devil and making God the author of those infernal dregs by which the soul is blinded, poisoned, and ruined. No, my hearer, these dreadful poisons are from beneath, and not from above. And I do not at all wonder at the devil trying to destroy Christ's work, because he well knows Christ has destroyed his works, for Christ came to destroy the works of the devil; and then, says the devil, I will try to destroy his works. Hence the thousands of ministers you have who say so little about the work of Christ, so little of the work of the Holy Spirit, and so little of the work of the Father. It's all about the creature; the creature is to do this, and to do that, and to do the other. Why, it is all feasible, but there is no gospel in it; it is all of the devil together, whenever the works of God are set aside, and the works of the creature are put into their place. Then, again, to hold the sovereignty of God in a way that takes away the responsibility of the creature, why, that would be erroneous also. Look at the absurdity of it. It is God, in the exercise of his sovereignty that has placed the creature in a responsible position. Do not you see that? Therefore, so far from his sovereignty taking the responsibility away, he has placed man under such responsibilities as he has thought proper; and as he has done so in the rightful exercise of his sovereignty, by virtue of what he is, God over all, blessed for evermore, he alone can release man from those responsibilities. Thus, then, we have the entire harmony between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of the creature. Hence many say, we do not know where sovereignty ends, and where human responsibility begins. Nor do I know where the one begins, but I do not know where the other ends; and I should be very sorry to know where it ends, for I should be very sorry if my God ceased to be sovereign, I should be very sorry if he ceased to do as he pleases; for I am sure but for this rightful exercise of his sovereignty he would never have had mercy upon me, nor upon you, if he had been in any way tied; but being entirely free, and reputed the inhabitants of the earth as nothing, and doing according to his own will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, none can stay his hand, nor say unto him, What doest thou? Here is a hope for the vilest sinner under the sun, because God is not tied, but can do as he pleased. But look at the harmony. Why, the responsibility of the creature is based upon divine sovereignty. Have we not a great many things in the Scripture that are right because he commands them, which would not be right without? What right had Jael to slay Sisera? What right had David to slay Goliath, and many others? A divine right, sir. God in his sovereignty authorized it. And therefore, it is right because he does it. Responsibility, therefore, is, that that God is pleased to make it, and is based upon divine

sovereignty and all is just because he does it. We could not help Adam's fall, we could not help what Eve did, and we were not personally there. Yet the great Judge of all has so constituted things, making Adam the federal head, that the whole human race fell with him, died in him. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." Here is divine sovereignty his so placing them; and here is divine justice, I do not say human justice, God's justice as well as his sovereignty is above everything human. He is just, and it is his justice; not human justice, but it is divine justice. Ever contend for the high prerogatives of your God; once give them up, you come into bondage directly. Thus, then, we see angels fell; sovereignty explains the secret by placing them upon that footing. We see Adam fell; God in his sovereignty so placed him. We see the Jews apostatized; God in his sovereignty so placed them. And so far as the fall of man is concerned, there is one thing results which we can understand, and that is, the Lord has taken advantage thereof to show the exceeding riches of his grace in the salvation of a number that no man can number. But whether he has any ulterior purpose in the fall of angels not yet made known, whether he has any ulterior purpose in the perdition of men not yet made known, I must leave. Secret things belong unto God; those that are revealed belong unto us. Thus, then, look at it in this light, that God in his sovereignty placed the Jews where they were: he lamented their apostasy, and would rather see them do well than see them disobey him, and subject themselves to those penalties; yet, while he had this view of them, and thus spoke of them, he did not choose to turn servants into sons. Sovereignty put them there, wished them well there, and there the matter ended.

We now come, secondly, to the sovereignty of God in placing his new covenant people on a different footing. First, see his sovereignty in the appointment of his dear Son. Was Jesus Christ put upon a conditional footing? He was. And how was he placed so? Sovereignty. It was sovereign love that sent the Savior, it was sovereign authority that sent the Savior, it was sovereign authority that appointed the Savior, and he was put upon a conditional footing. He was made under the law to redeem them that were under the law, only with this infinite difference, that the others failed; Jesus Christ neither failed nor was discouraged. He was to rise from the dead, and to possess the joy which he now possesses, and which he will forever possess, all this he was to have on certain conditions. He was to do the whole law of God, he was to continue in all things without exception; he was to bring in by that obedience a righteousness durable as his deity, durable as eternity, durable as God himself-everlasting righteousness. He was, when he reached thus far, to encompass in his person all the sins of the people given to him, all the sins of the People, past, present, and to come. Not one sin escaped the eternal Spirit, for Christ offered himself blameless through the eternal Spirit, and the eternal Spirit of God, in his omniscience, in his omnipresence, in his eternity, brought every sin to Christ, not one was omitted. And God the Father also imputed, laid all our sins upon Christ, and the sword awoke against Christ. And just so sure as the eternal Spirit of God brought every sin to Christ belonging to the people, just so sure will the Holy Ghost bring every soul to Christ. Ah, if you could have gone into the valley, and have first seen the dry bones, and have stood and watched the process- for what is there described as though it was done in a little time, in reality sets forth that which should be done in the progress of ages, -if thou could have gone into the valley after the Holy Spirit came in the universality of his power, and they all stood upon their feet an exceeding great army, I will venture to say you would not have found a dry bone, nor a bone at all, in the whole valley. All were quickened, all were alive, and all were brought in. Look at these two points, look at the greatness of the Holy Spirit-that Christ offered himself, and the Holy Spirit is the Remembrancer, and he brought all our sins to Christ. He made a clean sweep of all time, a clean sweep of every heart, of every tongue-compassed the whole, gathered

them together on Christ; Christ encompassed them, suffered the penalty, groaned, bled, overcame. And when the work was entirely done, never to be undone; when he felt the Holy Spirit had no more to bring, God the Father had no more to demand, all was calm, triumphant and universal calm; mercy and truth had met together, righteousness and peace embraced each other; he said, "It is finished," bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. The conditions are performed, the covenant is confirmed, the promise yea and amen, the devil defeated, sin is gone, death overcome, hell closed, heaven opened, the people saved, grace reigning, and the triumph must last forever, for ever and ever. Sovereignty, then, appointed the Savior -sovereign love. Was God under any obligation to send the Savior? Was he under any obligation to save any one? No; God was pleased to do it. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." But now we will come to the people. What is the footing on which he has placed his people? A fourfold footing, he has placed them on. The first is that we have stated, by his one offering they are perfected forever. How therefore, can condemnation come to them? How can Satan touch them? How can sin touch them? How can death touch them? How can the law touch them? How can anything ultimately injurious touch them? "He abideth," says John, while speaking of the soul that is in Christ, "and the wicked one toucheth him not." "Nothing shall by any means hurt you."

Here then, the people stand in God's counsel, in God's arrangement, upon a foundation, and upon a perfection that can never, no, never give way. That is one part. The second is this. He brought the Israelites out of Egypt, but that did not regenerate their souls. He sustained them with temporal manna, but that was not the bread of eternal life; and he supplied them with water from the brook, but that was not the water of everlasting life. Now his new-covenant people, then, he regenerates them, quickens their souls into life, and makes them and keeps up that feeling in them, as determined to have no other God as he is determined they shall have no other God. "I will be their God;" sin shall not hinder me, Satan shall not hinder me, they themselves shall not hinder me; "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." So, we are, Lord; so, we are, Lord. Hundreds now within the sound of my voice can say that, Grace reigning as it did in the souls of the prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, we would give up the last drop of our blood before we would surrender one particle of that dear yea and amen truth by which we are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end. "Other lords have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name." "This people have I formed for myself," and they will have no other Lord; they abhor and reject all others. Now do you find the Lord ever lamenting over his sheep, that they will not come, or that he has lost some of them? Do you find the Lord lamenting over Moses, that Moses would not do everything according to the pattern shown him in the mount? Do you find the Lord lamenting over Joshua, that Joshua was not decided enough? Do you find the Lord lamenting over his prophets, over David, saying, David, what a number of gods you are gone after? Not a word about it. David followed the Lord with all his heart. Do you find the Savior in the 17th chapter of John mourning over his disciples, and saying, Oh, that thou wouldst harken unto me! Oh, that thou had paid attention to my counsels! Oh, it is at your peril, so many sermons as you have heard, you have not gone to God. Oh, you will be damned with a double damnation for not listening to my words? No; "I have given them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. The truth is written not on tables of stones, but in the fleshy tables of their hearts by the vital work of the eternal Spirit of God; born again of an incorruptible seed, that liveth and abideth forever. Thus, then, sovereignty sent the Savior, and sovereignty has placed you upon this new covenant footing. "In Isaac shall

thy seed be called." "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated." I have an election; and I have not chosen one for his goodness, nor rejected the other for his badness, for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil "-bless our God! It makes me love him to think of his independence of birth; "that the purpose of God according to election might stand -of Jacob's goodness? No, - "not of works, but of him that calleth." Here stands the purpose of election. What is the purpose of election? Why, that you should be ultimately holy, without blame before him; that you should bathe your soul in everlasting love; and if this stood upon works should we come short of it all, but it is not of works, but of him that calls, and the gifts and calling of God in these matters are without repentance. Thirdly, the people stand upon the immutability of God, He changes not. He has called you out of spiritual darkness, but he will not call you back again. Sin, and Satan, and the world may call you back again, but you will not go; for the ancients had opportunity to return, but they desired a better country; they knew, therefore, that God was a faithful and unchanging God. Forth, there comes his oath. "He could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, in blessing I will bless thee." Did he ever say this to fallen angels? No. Did he say this to Adam? No. Did he say this to the Jews? No. But he does say it to his people in and by his dear Son: for "the Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." Here is sovereignty, then -having mercy upon whom he will have mercy. Now do not be angry with me. Some of you to whom his this is rather strange go home and think about it, and read the 9th chapter of the Romans, and you will find there that the apostle goes there as far as I have done, and further too. The sovereignty of God is not only important to an understanding of the Scriptures, but it is essential to your welfare. There is nothing impressed upon my mind more than the great truth of God's sovereignty. I cannot look at this chapel without saying to myself, is anything too hard for the Lord? It hath pleased the Lord so to favor us?

"What was there in us to merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
Even so, Father, we ever must sing,
For so it seemed good in thy sight.

And if we come down from this great truth we shall come down from all our dignity, if we give up the delightful truth that the Lord God omnipotent reigns. I could go on here and run all through the Scriptures and show how every saint of God that has achieved great things has done it by the sovereign power and sovereign authority of the highest God.

But I will now come, lastly, to notice the meaning of my text in its details. Now what the Lord said to the Jews conditionally, "He should have fed them," he said to his people positively in and by his dear Son. And, spiritually, what is the finest of the wheat? You will say, Why, Jesus Christ is the finest of the wheat. Well, that is a truth; a delightful truth; but do not think that that will exclude another which amounts to the same thing. Let us take the finest of the wheat to mean the gospel. And I am sure of all words gospel words are the finest, gospel words are the most sustaining, gospel words are the most nourishing. Do we not from time to time feel there is nothing so nourishing for us as the blessed truths of the gospel? They are indeed the finest of the wheat. And the Lord confirms the taste. I am sure mine is; I am a man of taste, I assure you, and have been for forty years-more than that now. I have a nice taste for the gospel; and if it does not taste to you as it does to me, that shows that your palate is not right, that is all; shows your palate is fleshly, and not refined, shows you are a very coarse man; whereas if you have a taste for the gospel in the

strict sense of the gospel, it will show that you are a very refined-minded man. David, in the 19th Psalm, when tracing out the various operations of the gospel in converting the soul, in enlightening the eyes, in rejoicing the heart, said of these blessed truths, "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Bless the Lord then that he does give his people a taste for the truth, and nothing else will do for them. Why, if I had given way in my time to one-half of the feasible tales that men tell, I should have left off living upon the finest of the wheat and been living upon the chaff of human doctrine long ago. The Lord said, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" What indeed, Lord? Some people like a little chaff mixed; for myself I like the pure wheat without any admixture of chaff, without any Baxterian sand or Fuller's earth. The finest of the wheat, the people of God will have nothing else. The Lord keep you standing fast in the truth; for you will find the pure truths of the gospel, the longer you live the more you will need them. But the finest will here mean the best. What can be like the truth of God's everlasting love? What can be like the truth of your name registered in heaven before the world was, continuing there while the world is, and will be there forever? What can be more delightful than your completeness in the dear Savior, and the Lord not beholding iniquity in you, nor seeing any perverseness in you, and that there is no enchantment against you, nor any divination against you, for the Lord will be there to confound it all and overcome it all, and to bring you off more than conqueror at the last? And then, lastly, "with honey out of the rock should have satisfied thee." First, you have here sweetness. The time will come when we shall not wish to change our names from sweetness to bitterness, as we sometimes have. "Call me no more Naomi" -that is, pleasant and sweet; "call me Mara" -bitter- "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." But her bitterness as shall the bitterness of all the people of God, passes off, and there shall be nothing, no, nothing but sweetness left. Hence, perhaps to set before us more emphatically the blessedness of the destiny of the saints the Promised Land in its typical character is said to be a land flowing with milk and honey. Am I speaking to one precious soul that has no concern for these things? Do you know nothing of the bitterness of your state as a sinner? Nothing of longing after God?