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Samuel Tilden

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GOD THE AUTHOR OF ALL THINGS.

A

SERMON,

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SERMON.

I. SAMUEL xxii. part 22.

"I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy Father's house."

Among the numerous subjects of controversy, which have engaged the attention of polemic writers, and which have caused divisions in the christian church, no one has been more signalized, or become more prominent than the question, whether the supreme Being can properly be said to be the author of *all things*, in the most extensive use of the words. While that class of doctors, which have, for ages, defended the system of divinity, which embraces the doctrine of the foreordination of all things, have found no difficulty in confounding the advocates of the opposite hypothesis, they have never been able to free their own creed from objections, no less embarrassing, than those with which they confounded their opposers. The predestinarian, by urging the foreknowledge of God in all things, which the Arminian doctors could not deny, have been able to demonstrate the *certainty* of all events as clearly as this certainty is established by the hypothesis of predestination. This argument the Arminian has never been able to overcome. But though he could never satisfy the predestinarian that human agency could possibly go contrary to the divine prescience, he could put him to utter confusion by showing that by the doctrine of foreordination, God is made the author of all the sin, which wicked beings have committed. And then, making use of a proposition which they both allow, that sin deserves and must receive an infinite and an endless punishment, he presents the appalling absurdity to his ad-

versary, of the foreordination of sin by the divine Being, and also the foreordination of this infinite punishment for sin!

We have here in plain view, the great and embarrassing subject of controversy, and even of contention, which has divided the christian church for ages; and if we carefully observe, we may easily discover where all the difficulty lies. Why does the Arminian, or what we now call the free-willer, wish to find that agency in man for which he contends? The fact is, he wants it for the sole purpose of making out on the one hand, the justice of the sinner's endless punishment; and on the other, he wishes to free the divine Being from that cruel character which is given him by the doctrine which makes him the author of the sin for which he condemns the sinner to endless sufferings. The Arminian has not been able to discover, nor has the predestinarian shown him, that could he find in man any agency which he should choose to describe, it would then be necessary to allow that this agency, being constituted by the Creator, must have been designed by him for a definite purpose, which purpose could not fail of being effected. So, after all, he involves himself in the same appalling absurdity with which he confounds his adversary. For there is no moral difference in saying that our heavenly Father is the author of that sin for which he condemns his children to endless suffering, and saying that he is the author of that agency which he designed should eventually terminate in the same result.

But the whole difficulty would be removed at once, if the doctors, on both sides of the controversy, could come to the conclusion to leave out of the christian creed the hypothesis of endless punishment. To maintain this erroneous proposition the predestinarian becomes confounded with the relentless cruelty, in which he involves the divine Being; and to maintain the same offensive doctrine, the Arminian con-

fuses himself with the ignorance, which his doctrine attributes to him who knows all things. What objection could the Arminian bring to the doctrine of predestination, could he first free his own mind from the doctrine of endless punishment, and then find no such error in the system of predestination? There must surely be something besides the dictates of enlightened reason, and the aspirations of a benevolent heart; which would raise objections to the doctrine which teaches that God predetermined all events, and overrules them all for the ultimate good of all his creatures.

With a view to bring this all-important subject before my hearers this morning, and to furnish some arguments for the support of the right of the case, the text, which has been read, was selected. But the query may arise,—What has the text to do with the subject? In reply, we say, that the text stands in support of the doctrine, that contends that the cause of what is called evil may be innocent.

In his flight from the unrighteous vengeance of Saul, king of Israel, David, destitute of provision and of armour, came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest, who not knowing that his majesty was offended with so worthy a servant as he supposed David to be, accommodated him with a supply of holy bread, as he had no other, and gave him also the sword which David took from Goliath when he slew him. Thus provided, David continued his flight from Saul. But Doeg, the Edomite, was present when the priest accommodated David, and afterwards informed Saul of the fact, and accused Ahimelech to his majesty: The king was enraged against the priest and demanded of him thus: "Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread, and a sword, and hast inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?" It was in vain that Ahimelech pleaded his innocence, saying; "And who is so faithful among all thy servants

as David, which is the king's son-in-law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honorable in thine house? Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? be it far from me. Let not the king impute any thing unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father: for thy servant knew nothing of all this less or more." Absolute power, which is not amenable to law, when exercised by enraged majesty, is deaf to all the eloquence of innocence, and dooms to destruction without the semblance of justice, or the feelings of humanity. The following sentence was immediately pronounced:—"Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house." Such was the odious character of this wicked sentence, that Saul's footmen, when commanded to slay the priests of the Lord, refused. Doeg, in the spirit of his master, accomplished this memorable massacre, and put to death, that day, eighty-five persons who wore the linen ephod. He moreover destroyed the city of Nob, old and young, male and female, and even the cattle. One son of Ahimelech alone escaped and came to David, and informed him of the whole of this tragedy. David, in reply, told Abiathar that he knew, when he was with his father, that Doeg would inform Saul of what transpired, and told him that he had been the occasion of the death of all the persons of his father's house; but at the same time promised him protection.

Having so far attended to the history, in which our subject is found, we may proceed to examine the moral character of David, in relation to the murderous scene which we have described. Was David the innocent cause of this murder, or was he the criminal cause? Here there can be but one answer. David was the innocent cause of this outrageous piece of wickedness. But the question will be asked; was there a criminal cause of the same wicked outrage? Here again there can be no doubt. If there had been no

criminal design the act could not have been morally wrong. The act of taking life, as well as all other acts, is innocent, or criminal, according to the design of the principle agent, who performs the act. But Saul and Doeg were unquestionably criminal, in relation to this affair; and it is very evident that they were important agents in it.

The discerning hearer will now grow apprehensive that the nice point, that pivot on which this general subject must turn, is going to be either overlooked, or kept out of the argument. It is very clear, that in order for our reasoning to result in showing that God is the innocent cause of all things; it must be shown that he is the innocent cause even of criminality itself. We have no fears on this subject, no wish to hide behind some insolvable mystery. Let us then examine the case of Saul and David. Saul was determined to take the life of David; and such was the strength of this determination and the fury which accompanied it, that whatever seemed to stand in the way to restrain the course of his vengeance, became subject to it. This in Saul was criminal; it was the dictate of envy. David had done nothing at which Saul was offended; but his loyalty to the king, his love of his country's freedom, and above all his sacred regard to the character of the God of Israel, had acquired him a fame, which eclipsed the glory of Saul and kindled the fire of jealousy in his heart.

In the movements of David there appears nothing that was reprehensible. Goliath had for forty days shown himself from the front of the Philistine army, proudly vaunting, and defying the host of Israel. He proposed to decide the fate of a pending battle by single combat, if the army of Israel could furnish a champion to meet him. But Saul and his men were afraid; nor did any one possess the courage to accept the challenge. David was then a ruddy youth, whom his father sent to the camp to bear his favor to his sons,

who were in the army. When he saw Goliath vapouring in his vanity, and heard him defying the army of Israel; and when, to his mortification, he saw his own brethren and the whole host of his people shrinking with fear at the profane boasting of the uncircumcised champion, he felt emotions which we can more readily conceive than describe. He was not a moment in deciding, in his mind, that Goliath's challenge ought to be accepted. This was no sooner known by Saul than he made inquiry, and found the youth ready to meet in single combat, this champion, who was the terror of Saul and all his men of war. Saul feared for the safety of David, and expostulated with him. He reminded him of his youth, and that he was going to meet a foe who had been a man of war from his youth. But David informed Saul that he had slain a lion and a bear, which attempted to rob his father's flock of a lamb, and that he was confident that God would make that uncircumcised Philistine as one of them. Such was Saul's concern for David that he put his own armour on him, and furnished him with all the defence possible. But David refused all these, and taking his staff and sling, chose five smooth stones out of the brook, with which he fearlessly met and overcame this fearful champion. This David was a Benjamite, and well skilled in the use of the sling; and with this weapon he prevailed. Now what we desire to have considered here is the perfect innocence of David, in this interesting combat. Saul, the king, was concerned for nothing, as it appears, but for the safety of this beautiful youth. He felt no apprehensions that any prejudice to himself could result from David's success in this case. No doubt the sincere desire of his heart was gratified when he saw the champion fall. But when Saul and his victorious army returned in triumph, and the women came out of the cities to meet the king, singing and dancing, and exclaiming, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten

thousands, those elements which compose the demon of envy, were immediately called together, and kindled into a fury of horrid mien.

Let us now look at this whole affair; and let candor judge and decide whether David, by the help of God, in whom he trusted, was not the innocent cause of Saul's deadly envy.—It really seems that the subject is too plain to either need argument, or admit of doubt. But says the hearer; though this must be allowed, the question arises, wherein does the criminality of Saul's envy consist, if it were the effect of that which was innocent and good? The answer is ready—Saul's criminality consisted in his designing evil; and it was this evil design which led him to all the acts of injustice and cruelty which he committed against David and others, on his account. But another question here presents its demands; and it is one too of high consideration in relation to the general subject. Why does not this argument suppose the same criminality in the divine Being, who is allowed to be the cause of this criminal envy, as it attributes to Saul, in whose breast it burned? To this weighty question the answer is also ready. It is because the argument contends that the design which the divine Being had in causing this envy in Saul was a good design. The whole was designed and overruled by our heavenly Father for good, and was wholly dictated by that heavenly wisdom which is full of mercy and good fruits, and which is without partiality. We will here allow the objector to urge what to him may seem to be of weight, that as the argument allows that the divine Being intended and caused all the evil which actually took place, by the agency of Saul, if we argue that the divine Being is innocent in this case, we should also allow the innocency of Saul. But to this we reply: there is a very plain difference in the moral character which the argument attributes to the Creator and to the creature. All the evil which actually took place was designed by the Creator for

the good of all concerned; but in the design of the creature there was not the smallest particle of divine benevolence or good will; and it is the difference in the moral nature of those opposite designs, which constitutes the moral difference in the characters of the Creator and the creature. If it could be seen that Saul, in all his conduct which we have noticed, was actuated by a purely benevolent disposition, designing the whole for the ultimate good of all whom his acts concerned, and seeing at the same time how this good would be brought about by such means, we should see no cause why his entire innocence should not be allowed. But not being able to find this good design in Saul, nor the least shadow of evidence of its existence, we are compelled to ascribe to him the character of cruel, relentless envy.

The hearer is now, unquestionably, prepared to see that it is absolutely necessary to leave out of our creed the doctrine of infinite evil, or unlimited suffering, as it is impossible for such evil or suffering to be overruled for the good of those who endure it. As our argument contends that God is the innocent cause of the sin which men commit, and maintains this hypothesis on the ground that he designs all this sin and its consequent guilt, condemnation and suffering, for the ultimate good of all, we see that the admission of endless suffering would destroy every vestage of this system of reasoning, as it is not possible to conceive how suffering, which will never end, can result in the benefit of the sufferer. Sound reasoning, on this subject, will moreover show, that as the designing of evil, without intending it for good, constitutes the sinful or criminal cause, by allowing that the divine Being ever was the cause of that which he did not design for ultimate good, we charge him with criminality!

The instructions of the blessed Saviour will assist us in illustrating the principle that the cause of moral evil may be innocent. The following are his words: "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, nay; but

rather division; for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be those of his own household." In this passage the Saviour acknowledges that he came to effect divisions in families; to make fathers and sons foes to each other, and to set at variance mothers and daughters. But we cannot suppose that he meant to accuse himself of being the criminal cause of those deadly feuds and family quarrels; nor can it be allowed, by any who know his spirit and doctrine, and who love the same, that he was the criminal cause of such unhappy divisions. We find the criminal cause of all such wickedness in the superstition and bigotry of the religious people of those times, in which the gospel was planted in our world. The doctrine of Jesus was as pure as the light of heaven; its favor was as free as the descending rain; it fell on the multitude like gentle dew on the grass of the field; the common people heard him gladly and wondered at the gracious words which he uttered; but the bigoted priests, scribes and pharisees, who had made the law of God void by their traditions, found that the doctrine of Jesus with all its precepts would sweep away the whole system of their religion, if it should prevail. They were stung with jealousy, and fired with deadly envy against the blessed Son of God, as was king Saul against David. Hence proceeded that spirit of hostility against the doctrine and religion of Jesus, which was the criminal cause of those unhappy divisions among the people, and which introduced into families the bane of discord and deadly hate.

Here it is necessary to mark the difference between the innocent and the criminal cause. Divine wisdom saw that all this enmity and opposition to the gospel were necessary

for the fulfilment of the declarations of the prophets concerning the Messiah, that all things might be fulfilled that were written concerning him. The same divine wisdom designed all this opposition and persecution, which were carried on with such vehemence, for the purpose of promoting the cause of truth, which in its final effects would overcome and subdue the false religion which caused the scribes and pharisees to oppose it. This foreknowledge of God and his benevolent design, in all this vast concern, show most clearly that he was the innoeent cause of the whole. But on the part of the active agents, who opposed and persecuted the gospel and those who promulgated it, we find no benevolent, no gracious design or purpose; but the most heated jealousy and inflamed envy which ever burned in the breast of the wicked. This spirit, and design to oppose and overthrow the truth, prove, as clearly as any thing can be proved, that criminality was found in the enemies of Christ. If on due examination we were able to discover, that the chief priests, the scribes and pharisees, together with all who opposed Christ and his doctrine, understood that their exertions were necessary for the promotion of this doctrine, and that they designed it for that purpose, it would prove that they were the friends of Christ and his religion, and would establish their innocency beyond all dispute. But their evil design proves that they were the criminal cause of the miseries which their opposition to the religion of Jesus produced; but the gracious design of our heavenly Father, in relation to all this enmity, and the acknowledged fact that he overruled the whole for the good of all concerned, prove that he was the innocent cause of all these events.

Another case, recorded in scripture, which presents our general subject in a light most convincing, is that of the envy and enmity of the brethren of Joseph towards him. A careful examination of the circumstances which produced

their envy will quickly arrive at an understanding of their innocency. God, in his gracious wisdom inspired Joseph with dreams which he, in all the simplicity and innocency of childhood, related in the family circle. The dreams were easily and quickly understood by his brethren to indicate the future exaltation of Joseph, and the humble dependance of his brethren, and their submission to his authority. For these dreams his brethren hated him; and the fire of their envy burned with such vehemence as to overpower the sweet sympathies of kindred affections, and to effect in their minds the murderous design of destroying their brother. If wickedness ever presented dyes of an appalling cast, we find those colors in the deception which those brethren practiced on their venerable father, when they presented him with the bloody coat of his son, of his beloved Joseph. How hard must have been their hearts not to relent when they saw the anguish of their father, and heard his exclamation, "It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces,—I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning." Only go one step back of the envy which was kindled in the breasts of those unhappy brethren, and all is peaceful innocency.—God was the innocent cause of this envy by inspiring Joseph with such dreams. Joseph was an innocent cause of the same envy by relating his dreams to the family. This envy was the criminal cause of that conduct which effectually destroyed the felicity of the sacred family circle, drowned the holy patriarch in sorrow's dark waters, and ingulphed the wicked perpetrators of this outrage in guilt and condemnation.

As the causes which produced the wickedness which was practiced, by the brethren of Joseph, against him, were innocent, and as the whole of this wickedness was overruled, by divine wisdom and goodness, unto a benevolent end, it seems to furnish incontestable proof of the principle for

which we have contended in this discourse. But in order to see how this general argument fully and effectually does away this doctrine of endless punishment for sin, and thereby removes the great and weighty objection, which lies in the mind of the professed Arminian, against the doctrine of predestination, and against allowing that God is the cause of all events, it is necessary to show that sin is designed by our heavenly Father, not only for good, on some broad and general principle, but it is necessary to show that it is designed and overruled for the good of those who are its criminal agents. A most clear and convincing manifestation of this infinitely important fact we have in the case of Joseph's brethren, to which we have in part attended. It is seen that in consequence of their envy and hatred they sold their brother to merchants who again sold him for a slave in Egypt; and it is also very evident that in consequence of his becoming a servant in the house of Potiphar he became the subject of the persecution of his wicked mistress, who caused him to be cast into prison ; and it is also evident that his being thus confined was the cause of his acquaintance with the chief baker and chief butler, whose dreams he interpreted, which was the cause of his being brought before Pharaoh to interpret his dreams, which none of the wise men of Egypt could possibly solve. This astonishing instance of the wisdom of Joseph was the cause of his advancement to authority and power next to the throne, which proved an incalculable blessing to all Egypt and the whole surrounding country, by seasonably laying up in store sufficient corn to sustain the inhabitants of the land during seven years of famine. Thus we see that the envy and wickedness of Joseph's brethren, bitter as gaul and wormwood as they flowed, in a perturbed, deadly stream, at first, carried immense blessings into Egypt and the adjoining country. But were those envious, wicked brethren excluded from the favors which resulted to thousands of others? No ; we see them coming into Egypt to buy corn for their

wanting families; they bow to Joseph before they know him, and obtain a supply of the staff of life at his hands without knowing that it was he whom they hated and sold, who thus opened his hand to their relief. But when he made himself known to his brethren, with what tenderness and affection did he address them, saying; "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now, therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life." And moreover, even after the death of their father, when these brethren feared what Joseph might do to them for their trespass against him, and came and fell down before him and craved his forgiveness, he kindly replied; "Fear not—ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive—fear not; I will nourish you and your little ones." In this reply Joseph sets up the doctrine which we are endeavoring to exemplify. "*Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.*" What did God mean unto good? Answer—the very evil which they thought against Joseph. What good did God intend by that evil which those brethren intended? Answer, that of saving many thousands of lives, and the lives of those brethren with the rest. The whole family of promise was preserved from famine by the consequences resulting from that envy which moved those brethren to sell Joseph.

If our heavenly Father has given us to understand, and to know, that it is consistent with his moral perfections to design and overrule the evil of sin, in any instance, for general good, and even for the good of those who are criminal agents in it; it is by no means necessary that we should be able to discern the good which he designs by every instance of moral evil, in order to justify us in believing that he does design and overrule all sin in the same gracious manner. He, in compassion to us his weak and erring children, has given us abundant evidence of that blessed truth, that "where sin

bounded, grace did much more abound." In this doctrine we may find rest to our souls, and infinite reason to be thankful to God and humbly joyful in his presence.

We feel unwilling to leave this subject, until we notice a very popular objection which its opposers urge against it. They say, if this doctrine be allowed, we may do evil that good may come. After this same manner did the enemies of the apostles slander them, reporting that they said ; "Let us do evil, that good may come."

In replying to this unwise objection we will ask the opposer to make the trial, that he may convince himself. What has he got to do ? He is to do evil that good may come. Then his design in what he does must be that good may come.— But this very design constitutes his act morally good ; for the moral character of every act is determined by the design of the actor. If Joseph's brethren had seen into futurity, and with a clear understanding had comprehended the necessity of Joseph's going into Egypt, and had sold him for the purpose of bringing his dreams to pass, in compliance with the wisdom and design of God, there certainly would have been no enmity in their hearts towards their brother, nor moral evil in what they did. And there is another thing which the objector ought to know, and that is, that if Joseph's brethren had fully believed that God would overrule their envy and wickedness towards their brother, for his future exaltation, and their own benefit, it would have entirely overcome their envy and washed away the whole of their sin.

That the sentiment which we have endeavored to support in this discourse, may be fully believed and realized ; and that it may have and exert a happy moral influence on our hearts and lives, may God in mercy add his blessing.