

The Sole Consideration, that God is God, Sufficient to Still All Objections to His Sovereignty

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"Be still, and know that I am God." – Psalm 46:10

This psalm seems to be a song of the church in a time of great revolutions and desolations in the world. Therefore the church glories in God as her refuge, and strength, and present help, even in times of the greatest troubles and overturnings, verses 1-3, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." The church makes her boast of God, not only as being her help, by defending her from the desolations and calamities in which the rest of the world were involved, but also by supplying her, as a never-failing river, with refreshment, comfort, and joy, in the times of public calamities. See verse 4, 5, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early."

In the 6th and 8th verses are set forth the terrible changes and calamities which were in the world: "The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. Come, behold the works of God, what desolations he hath made in the earth." In the verse preceding the text is elegantly set forth the manner in which God delivers the church from these calamities, and especially from the desolations of war, and the rage of their enemies: "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire;" *i.e.* he maketh wars to cease when they are against his people; he breaketh the bow when bent against his saints.

Then follow the words of the text: "Be still, and know that I am God." The great works of God, wherein his sovereignty appeared, had been described in the foregoing verses. In the awful desolations that he made, and by delivering his people by terrible things, he showed his greatness and dominion. Herein he manifested his power and sovereignty, and so commands all *to be still, and know that he is God*. For, says he, "I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth."

In the words may be observed:

1. A duty described, to be still before God, and under the dispensations of his providence; which implies that we must be still as to *words*; not speaking against the sovereign dispensations of Providence, or complaining of them; not darkening counsel by words without knowledge, or justifying ourselves, and speaking great swelling words of vanity. We must be still as to *actions* and outward behavior, so as not to oppose God in his dispensations; and as to *the inward frame of our hearts*, cultivating a calm and quiet submission of soul to the sovereign pleasure of God, whatever it be.

2. We may observe the ground of this duty, *viz. the divinity of God*. His being God is a sufficient reason why we should be still before him, in no wise murmuring, or objecting, or opposing, but calmly and humbly submitting to him.

3. How we must fulfill this duty, of being still before God, *viz.* with a sense of his divinity, as seeing the ground of this duty, in that we know him to be God. Our submission is to be such as becomes rational creatures. God doth not require us to submit contrary to reason, but to submit as seeing the reason and ground of submission. — Hence, the bare consideration *that God is God*, may well be sufficient to still all objections and opposition against the divine sovereign dispensations.

This may appear by the following things:

1. In that he is God, he is an absolutely and infinitely *perfect* being; and it is impossible that he should do amiss. As he is eternal, and receives not his existence from any other, he cannot be limited in his being, or any attribute, to any certain determinate quantity. If anything have bounds fixed to it, there must be some cause or reason why those bounds are fixed just where they are. Whence it will follow, that every limited thing must have some cause. And therefore that being which has no cause must be unlimited.

It is most evident by the works of God, that his understanding and power are infinite. For he that hath made all things out of nothing, and upholds, and governs, and manages all things every moment, in all ages, without growing weary, must be of infinite power. He must also be of infinite knowledge; for if he made all things, and upholds and governs all things continually, it will follow, that he knows and perfectly sees all things, great and small, in heaven and earth, continually at one view; which cannot be without infinite understanding.

Being thus infinite in understanding and power, he must also be perfectly holy; for unholiness always argues some defect, some blindness. Where there is no darkness or delusion, there can be no unholiness. It is impossible that wickedness should consist with infinite light. God being infinite in power and knowledge, he must be self-sufficient and all-sufficient. Therefore it is impossible

that he should be under any temptation to do anything amiss; for he can have no end in doing it. When any are tempted to do amiss, it is for selfish ends. But how can an all-sufficient Being, who wants nothing, be tempted to do evil for selfish ends? So that God is essentially holy, and nothing is more impossible than that God should do amiss.

2. As he is God, he is so *great*, that he is infinitely above all comprehension. And therefore it is unreasonable in us to quarrel with his dispensations, because they are mysterious. If he were a being that we could comprehend, he would not be God. It would be unreasonable to suppose any other, than that there should be many things in the nature of God, and in his works and government, to us mysterious, and which we never can fully find out.

What are we? and what do we make of ourselves, when we expect that God and his ways should be upon a level with our understandings? We are infinitely unequal to any such thing, as comprehending God. We may less unreasonably expect that a nutshell should contain the ocean: Job 11:7, etc. "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." If we were sensible of the distance which there is between God and us, we should see the reasonableness of that interrogation of the apostle, Rom. 9:20, "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?"

If we find fault with God's government, we virtually suppose ourselves fit to be God's counselors; whereas it becomes us rather, with great humility and adoration, to cry out with the apostle, Rom. 11:33, etc. "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory for ever." If little children should rise up and find fault with the supreme legislature of a nation, or quarrel with the mysterious administrations of the sovereign, would it not be looked upon that they meddled with things too high for them? And what are we but babes? Our understandings are infinitely less than those of babes, in comparison with the wisdom of God. It becomes us therefore to be sensible of it, and to behave ourselves accordingly. Psa. 131:1, 2, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child." This consideration alone of the infinite distance between God and us, and between God's understanding and ours, should be enough to still and quiet us concerning all that God does, however mysterious and unintelligible to us. — Nor have we any right to expect, that God should particularly explain to us the reason of his dispensations. It is fit that God should not give any account of his matters to us, worms of the dust, that we may

be sensible of our distance from him, and adore and submit to him in humble reverence.

Therefore we find, that when Job was so full of difficulty about the divine dispensations, God did not answer him by particularly explaining the reasons of his mysterious providence; but by showing him what a poor worm, what a nothing he was, and how much he himself was above him. This more became God than it would have done, to enter into a particular debate with him, or to unfold the mysterious difficulties. It became Job to submit to God in those things that he could not understand, and to this the reply tended to bring him. It is fit that God should dwell in thick darkness, or in light to which no man can approach, which no man hath seen nor can see. No wonder that a God of infinite glory shines with a brightness too strong and mighty for mortal eyes. For the angels themselves, those mighty spirits, are represented as covering their faces in this light; Isa. 6.

3. As he is God, all things are his *own*, and he hath a right to dispose of them according to his own pleasure. All things in this lower world are his; Job 41:11, "Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine." Yea, the whole universe is God's; Deu. 10:14, "Behold the heaven, and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's; the earth also with all that is therein." All things are his, because all things are from him; they are wholly from him, and from him alone. Those things which are made by men, are not wholly from them. When a man builds a house, it is not wholly from him. Nothing of which the house is made has its being from him. But all creatures are wholly and entirely the fruits of God's power, and therefore it is fit that they should be subject to, and for, his pleasure. Pro. 16:4 — And as all things are *from* God, so they are upheld in being *by* him, and would sink into nothing in a moment, if he did not uphold them. And all things are *to* him. Rom. 11:36, "For by him, and through him, and *to* him are all things." Col. 1:16, 17, "For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, principalities or powers: all things were created *by* him and *for* him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." All mankind are his; their lives, and breath, and being; "for in him we live, and move, and have our being." Our souls and capacities are from him. Eze. 18:4, "All souls are mine: as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son, is mine."

4. In that he is God, he is *worthy* to be sovereign over all things. Sometimes men are the owners of more than they are worthy of. But God is not only the owner of the whole world, as all is from and dependent on him; but such is his perfection, the excellency and dignity of his nature, that he is worthy of sovereignty over all. No man ought in the temper of his mind to be opposite to God's exercising the sovereignty of the universe, as if he were not worthy of it; for to be the absolute sovereign of the universe is not a glory or dignity too great for him. All things in heaven and earth, angels and men, are nothing in comparison with him. All are as the drop of the bucket, and as the light dust of the balance. It is therefore fit that everything should be in his hands, to be

disposed of according to his pleasure. — His will and pleasure are of infinitely greater importance than the will of creatures. It is fit that his will should take place, though contrary to the will of all other beings; that he should make himself his own end; and order all things for himself. — God is possessed of such perfections and excellencies as to qualify him to be the absolute sovereign of the world. — Certainly it is more fit that all things be under the guidance of a perfect unerring wisdom, than that they should be left to themselves to fall in confusion, or be brought to pass by blind causes. Yea, it is not fit that *any* affairs within the government of God should be left without the direction of his wise providence; least of all, things of the greatest importance.

It is absurd to suppose, that God is *obliged* to keep every creature from sinning and exposing himself to an adequate punishment. For if so, then it will follow, that there can be no such thing as a *moral government* of God over reasonable creatures. And it would be an absurdity for God to give commands; for he himself would be the party bound to see to the performance, and there could be no use of promises or threatenings. But if God may leave a creature to sin, and to expose himself to punishment, then it is much fitter and better that the matter should be ordered by wisdom, who should justly lie exposed by sin to punishment, and who not; than that it be left to come to pass by confused chance. It is unworthy of the Governor of the world to leave things to chance; it belongs to him to govern all things by wisdom. — And as God has *wisdom* to qualify him to be sovereign, so he has *power* also to enable him to execute the determinations of wisdom. And he is essentially and invariably *holy* and *righteous*, and infinitely *good*; whereby he is qualified to govern the world in the best manner. — Therefore, when he acts as sovereign of the world, it is fit that we should be still and willingly submit, and in no wise oppose his having the glory of his sovereignty; but should in a sense of his worthiness, cheerfully ascribe it to him, and say, “Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever;” and say with those in Rev. 5:13, “Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be to him that sitteth upon the throne.”

5. In that he is God, he *will* be sovereign, and *will* act as such. He sits on the throne of his sovereignty, and his kingdom ruleth over all. He will be exalted in his sovereign power and dominion, as he himself declares; “I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.” He will have all men to know, that he is most high over all the earth. He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven and amongst the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand. — There is no such thing as frustrating, or baffling, or undermining his designs; for he is great in counsel, and wonderful in working. His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord. Whatsoever God doth, it shall be forever. Nothing shall be put to it, nor anything taken from it. He will work, and who shall let it? He is able to dash in pieces the enemy. If men join hand in hand against him, to hinder or oppose his designs, he breaks the bow, he cuts the spear in sunder, he burneth the chariot in the fire. — He kills and he makes alive, he brings down and raises

up just as he pleases. Isa. 45:6, 7, “That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides me. I am the Lord, and there is none else; I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.”

Great men, and rich men, and wise men cannot hinder God from doing his pleasure. He leadeth counselors away spoiled, he accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor. There are many devices in a man’s heart, but the counsel of the Lord that shall stand, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations. — When he gives quietness, who can make trouble? When he hides his face, who can behold him? He breaketh down, and it cannot be built up again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening. When he purposeth, who shall disannul it? And when his hand is stretched out, who shall turn it back? — So there is no hindering God from being sovereign, and acting as such. “He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.” He hath the keys of hell and of death. He openeth, and no man shutteth: he shutteth, and no man openeth. This may show us the folly of opposing ourselves against the sovereign dispensations of God; and how much more wisely they act who quietly and sweetly submit to his sovereign will.

6. In that he is God, he is able to *avenge* himself on those who oppose his sovereignty. He is wise of heart, and mighty in strength. Who hath hardened himself against God and prospered? He that will contend with God must answer it. And what a poor creature is man to fight against God! Is he able to make his part good with him? Whoever of God’s enemies deal proudly, he will show that he is above them. They will be but as the chaff before the whirlwind, and shall be as the fat of lambs. They shall consume into smoke, they shall consume away. “Who would set the briers and thorns against him in battle? He would go through them, he would burn them together.” Isa. 27:4.

Application

A manifold improvement might be made of this doctrine, which a little reflection may suggest to each of us. But the improvement which I shall at this time make of it, shall be only in a *use of reproof* to such under convictions of sin, and fears of hell, as are not still, but oppose the sovereignty of God in the disposals of his grace. This doctrine shows the unreasonableness, and dreadful wickedness, of your refusing heartily to own the sovereignty of God in this matter. It shows that you know not *that God is God*. If you knew this, you would be inwardly still and quiet; you would humbly and calmly lie in the dust before a sovereign God, and would see sufficient reason for it.

In objecting and quarreling about the righteousness of God’s laws and threatenings, and his sovereign dispensations towards you and others, you oppose his *divinity*, you show your ignorance of his divine greatness and

excellency, and that you cannot bear that he should have divine honor. It is from low, mean thoughts of God, that you do in your minds oppose his sovereignty, that you are not sensible how dangerous your conduct is, and what an audacious thing it is for such a creature as man to strive with his Maker.

What poor creatures are you, that you should set up yourselves for judges over the Most High; that you should take it upon [yourself] to call God to an account; that you should say to the great Jehovah, what dost thou? and that you should pass sentence against him! If you knew that he is God, you would not act in this manner. But this knowledge would be sufficient to still and calm you concerning all God's dispensations, and you would say with Eli, in 1 Sam. 3:18, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good in his sight." — But here I shall be more particular in several things.

1. It is from *mean thoughts* of God that you are not convinced that you have by your sins deserved his eternal wrath and curse. If you had any proper sense of the infinite majesty, greatness, and holiness of God, you would see, that to be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, and there to have no rest day nor night, is not a punishment more than equal to the demerit of sin. — You would not have so good a thought of yourselves; you would not be so clean and pure in your own eyes; you would see that vile, unworthy, hell-deserving creatures you are. If you had not little thoughts of God, and were to consider how you have set yourselves against him — how you have slighted him, his commandments and threatenings, and despised his goodness and mercy, how often you have disobeyed, how obstinate you have been, how your whole lives have been filled up with sin against God — you would not wonder that God threatens to destroy you forever, but would wonder that he hath not actually done it before now.

If you had not mean thoughts of God, you would not find fault with him for not setting his love on you who never exercised any love to him. You would not think it unjust in God not to seek your interest and eternal welfare, who never would be persuaded at all to seek his glory. You would not think it unjust in him to slight and disregard you, who have so often and so long made light of God. If you had not mean thoughts of God, you never would think him obliged to bestow eternal salvation upon you, who have never been truly thankful for one mercy which you have already received of him. — What do you think of yourselves? What great ideas have you of yourselves? And what thoughts have you of God, that you think he is obliged to do so much for you though you treat him ever so ungratefully for the kindness which he hath already bestowed upon you all the days of your lives? It must be from little thoughts of God, that you think it unjust in him not to regard you when you call upon him; when he hath earnestly called to you, so long and so often, and you would not be persuaded to hearken to him. What thoughts have you of God, that you think he is more obliged to hear what you say to him, than you are to regard what he says to you?

It is from diminutive thoughts of God, that you think he is obliged to show mercy to you when you seek it, though you have been for a long time willfully sinning against him, provoking him to anger, and presuming that he would show you mercy when you should seek it. What kind of thoughts have you of God, that you think he is obliged, as it were, to yield himself up to be abused by men, so that when they have done, his mercy and pardoning grace shall not be in his own power, but he must be obliged to dispense them at their call?

2. It is from little thoughts of God, that you quarrel against his justice in the *condemnation of sinners*, from the doctrine of original sin. It must be because you do not know him to be God, and will not allow him to be sovereign. It is for want of a sense how much God is above you, that those things in him which are above your comprehension, are such difficulties and stumbling-blocks to you. It is for want of a sense how much the wisdom and understanding of God are above yours, and what poor, short-sighted, blind creatures you are, in comparison with him. If you were sensible what God is, you would see it most reasonable to expect that his ways should be far above the reason of man, and that he dwells in light which no man can approach unto, which no man hath seen, nor can see. — If men were sensible how excellent and perfect a Being he is, they would not be so apt to be jealous of him and to suspect him in things which lie beyond their understandings. It would be no difficulty with them to trust God out of sight. What horrid arrogance in worms of the dust, that they should think they have wisdom enough to examine and determine concerning what God doth, and to pass sentence on it as unjust! If you were sensible how great and glorious a being God is, it would not be such a difficulty with you to allow him the dignity of such absolute sovereignty, as that he should order as he pleases, whether every single man should stand for himself, or whether a common father should stand for all.

3. It is from mean thoughts of God, that you trust in your *own righteousness*, and think that God ought to respect you for it. If you knew how great a Being he is, if you saw that he is God indeed, you would see how unworthy, how miserable a present it is to be offered to such a Being. It is because you are blind, and know not what a Being he is with whom you have to do, that you make so much of your own righteousness. If you had your eyes open to see that he is God indeed, you would wonder how you could think to commend yourselves to so great a Being by your gifts, by such poor affections, such broken prayers, wherein is so much hypocrisy, and so much selfishness. — If you had not very mean thoughts of God, you would wonder that ever you could think of purchasing the favor and love of so great a God by your services. You would see that it would be unworthy of God to bestow such a mercy upon you, and peace with him, and his everlasting love, and the enjoyment of himself, for such a price as you have to offer; and that he would exceedingly dishonor himself in so doing. — If you saw what God is, you would exclaim, as Job did, Job 42:5, 6, “Now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” And as

Isaiah did, Isa. 6:5, "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

4. It is from mean thoughts of God, that you contend with him, because he bestows grace on some, and not on others. Thus God does. He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy; he takes one, and leaves another, of those who are in like circumstances; as it is said of Jacob and Esau, while they were not yet born, and had done neither good nor evil, Rom. 9:10-13. With this sinners often quarrel. But they who upon this ground quarrel with God, suppose him to be *bound* to bestow his grace on sinners. For if he be bound to none, then he may take his choice, and bestow it on whom he pleases. And his bestowing it on some brings no obligation on him to bestow it on others. Has God no right to his own grace? Is it not at his own disposal? And is God incapable of making a gift or present of it to any man? For a person cannot make a present of that which is not his own, or in his own right. It is impossible to *give a debt*.

But what a low thought of God does this argue! Consider what it is you would make of God. Must he be so tied up, that he cannot use his own pleasure in bestowing his own gifts? Is he obliged to bestow them on one, because it is his pleasure to bestow them on another? Is not God worthy to have the same right to dispose of his gifts, as a man has of his money? Or is it because God is not so great, and therefore should be more subject, more under bounds, than men? Is not God worthy to have as absolute a propriety in his goods as man has in his? At this rate, God cannot make a present of anything; he has nothing of his own to bestow. If he have a mind to show a peculiar favor to some, to lay some under special obligations, he cannot do it, on the supposition, because his favor is not at his own disposal! The truth is, men have low thoughts of God, or else they would willingly ascribe sovereignty to him in this matter. Mat. 20:15, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

God is pleased to show mercy to his enemies, according to his own sovereign pleasure. And surely it is fit he should. How unreasonable is it to think that God stands bound to his enemies! Therefore consider what you do in quarreling with God, and opposing his sovereignty. Consider with whom it is you contend. Let all who are sensible of their misery, and afraid of the wrath of God, consider these things. Those of you who have been long seeking salvation, but are in great terrors through fear that God will destroy you, consider what you have heard, *be still, and know that he is God*. When God seems to turn a deaf ear to your cries; when he seems to frown upon you; when he shows mercy to others, your equals, or those who are worse, and who have been seeking a less time than you; — be still. Consider who he is that disposes and orders these things. You shall consider it. You shall know it. He will make all men to know that *he is God*. You shall either know it for your good here, by submission, or to your cost hereafter.

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