

HOW GOD CONTROLS THE WICKED

Preached May 24, 1959, by Pastor Fred Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church,
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In discussing the subject of predestination, we oppose (or are faced with) the question: “to what extent and by what influence does God control the sons of men, as far as their thoughts, words, and deeds?” And we have considered first, for the past two Sundays, God’s method of dealing with the righteous, or His elect, and now this morning, may we consider with you God’s method of dealing with the wicked, or the non-elect.

I. We say first that God exerts upon the wicked a restraining influence, by which they are prevented from doing what it is they are naturally inclined to do, on many occasions. We have two examples.

Consider now the restraining influence which God exerts upon the wicked, as it is exemplified in the person of Balaam, the prophet hired by Balak to curse the Israelites. One cannot read the inspired narrative without discovering that, left to himself, Balaam had readily and certainly accepted the offer of Balak to curse the Israelites. How evidently God restrained the impulses of his heart is seen from his own acknowledgement, when he said ***“How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied? Behold, I have received commandment to bless, and He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it.”*** (*Numbers 23:8, 20*)

Not only does God exert a restraining influence upon wicked individuals, but he also exerts that same influence upon whole peoples as well. A remarkable illustration of this is found in ***Exodus 34:24: “For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year.”*** Three times, every male Israelite, at the command of God, left his home and inheritance and journeyed to Jerusalem to keep the feast of the LORD, every year. And in the above scripture, we learn that God promised them that while they were in Jerusalem, he would guard their unprotected homes by restraining the covetous designs and desires of their heathen neighbors.

II. We say second that God exerts upon the wicked a softening influence, disposing them contrary to their natural inclination, to do that which will promote His cause. That is very precious to me.

I refer to Joseph's history as an example of God exerting a restraining influence upon the wicked. Now let us note how his experiences in Egypt as exemplifying our assertion that God also exerts a softening influence upon the unrighteous. We are told that while he was in the house of Potiphar, the LORD was with Joseph, and his master saw the LORD was with him. In consequence, Joseph found favor in his sight, and he made him overseer over his house. (*Genesis 39:3-4*) Later, when Joseph was unjustly cast into prison, we are told that the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. (*Genesis 39:21*) And in consequence, the prison keeper showed him much kindness and honor. Finally, after his release from prison, we learn from *Acts 7:10* that the LORD gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

And equally striking evidence of God's power to melt the hearts of His enemies was seen in Pharaoh's daughter's treatment of the infant Moses. My friends, she had *compassion* on him, the word is, in *Exodus 2:6*. And accordingly, the young life was spared, and later Moses became the adopted son of this princess. God has access to the hearts of all men, and he softens or hardens them according to His sovereign purpose.

The profane Esau swore vengeance upon his brother, for the deception which he had practiced upon his father, yet when next he met Jacob, instead of slaying him, we are told that Esau fell on his neck and kissed him. (*Genesis 32:4*)

Ahab, the weak and wicked consort of Jezebel his heathen wife, was highly enraged against Elijah the prophet, at whose word the heavens had been shut up for three years and a half. So angry was he against the one whom he regarded as his enemy that we are told he searched for him in every nation and kingdom. When he could not be found, he sword an oath, swearing that he would slay Elijah. Yet when they met, instead of killing the prophet, Ahab meekly obeyed Elijah's behest, and sent unto all of the children of Israel and gathered the prophets together onto Mount Carmel.

Again, Esther the poor Jewess is about to enter the presence chamber of the august Medo-Persian monarch, which, said she, was not according to the law. (*Esther 4:16*) She went in expecting to perish, but we are told she obtained favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter. (*Esther 5:2*)

Yet again, the boy Daniel is a captive in a foreign court, the king appointed a daily provision of meat and drink for Daniel and his fellows. The king appointed it, but Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the allotted portion, and accordingly made known his purpose to his master, the prince of the eunuchs, and what happened? That his master was a heathen and feared the king, that he turned then upon Daniel and angrily demanded that his orders be promptly carried out? No, for we read **“now God, hath brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.”** (*Daniel 1:9*) My friends, **“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will.”** (*Proverbs 21:1*)

III. Third, God exerts a directing influence, so that good is made to result from their intended evil.

I again revert to the history of Joseph as a case in point. In selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites, his brothers were actuated by cruel and heartless motives. Their object was to make away with him, and in the passing of these traveling traders, were furnished an easy way out. To them, the act was nothing more than the enslaving of a noble youth for the sake of gain. But now, observe how God was secretly working and overruling their wicked actions. Providence so ordered it that these Ishmaelites passed by just in time to prevent Joseph being murdered, for his brethren had already taken counsel together to put him to death. Further, these Ishmaelites were journeying to Egypt, which was the very country to which God had purposed to send Joseph. He ordained that they should purchase Joseph just when they did. That the hand of God was in this incident, and that it was something more than a fortunate coincidence, is clear from the words of Joseph to his brethren at a later date: **“And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”** (*Genesis 45:7*)

Another striking illustration of God directing the wicked is found in *Isaiah 10:5-7*: **“O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the**

people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.” Assyria’s king had determined to be a world conqueror, to cut off nations not a few, but God directed and controlled his military lust and ambition, and caused him to confine his attention to the conquering of the insignificant nation of Israel. Such a task was not in the proud king’s heart; he meant it not so. But God gave him this charge, and he could do nothing but fulfill it. Also see Judges 7:22.

But, the supreme example of the controlling, directing influence which God exerts upon the wicked is the cross of Christ, with all of its attending circumstances. If ever the superintending providence of God was witnessed, it was there. From all eternity, God had predestined every detail of that event-of-all-events. Nothing was left to chance or the caprice of men. God had decreed when and where and how His blessed son was to die. Much of what he had purposed concerning the crucifixion had been made known through the Old Testament prophets, and in the accurate and literal fulfillment of these prophecies, we have clear proof and full demonstration of the controlling and directing influence which God exerts upon the wicked. Not a thing occurred except as God had ordained, and all that he had ordained took place exactly as he had purposed it. It had been decreed and made known in scripture that the Savior should be betrayed by one of His own disciples by His familiar friend. (*Psalm 41:9*) Then the apostle Judas was the one who sold Him, and it had been decreed that the betrayer should receive for his awful perfidy thirty pieces of silver. Then were the chief priests moved to offer him this very sum. It had been decreed that this betrayal sum should be put to a particular use, namely the purchase of the Potter’s Field. Then, the hand of God directs Judas to return the money to the chief priests, and so guided their counsel (*Matthew 27:7*) that they did this very thing. It had been decreed that there should be those who bore false witness against our dear LORD. (*Psalm 35:11*) Then accordingly, such were raised up, and you know the story. It had been decreed that the LORD of glory should be spat upon and scourged. (*Isaiah 50:6*) Then there were not found wanting those who were vile enough to do so. It had been decreed from eternity that the Savior would be numbered with the transgressors. Then, unknown to himself, Pilot, directed by God, gave orders for His crucifixion, along with two

thieves. It had been decreed that vinegar and gall should be given him to drink while he hung upon the cross. Then this decree was executed to the very letter. It had been decreed that the heartless soldiers should gamble for his garments, then sure enough they did this very thing. And so forth, and so forth, that God had the power and exerted it, to direct and superintend everything that was done on that day of days.

IV. And four, dear friends, God also hardens the hearts of wicked men, and blinds their minds. God hardens men's hearts. God blinds men's eyes. So scripture represents Him. In developing this theme of the Sovereignty of God, we recognize that we have now reached its most solemn aspect of all, and that here especially we need to keep very close to the words of the bible. God forbid that I personally should go one fraction further than His word goes.

We read ***“He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants.” (Psalm 105:25)*** The reference here is the sojourn of the descendants of Jacob in the land of Egypt, when after the death of the Pharaoh who had welcomed the old patriarch and his family, there rose up a new king who knew not Joseph. In his days the children of Israel had increased greatly, so that they outnumbered the Egyptians. Then it was that God turned their heart to hate His people.

So it was also after Israel had entered Canaan, we read there was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. All other, they took in battle, for it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, ***“that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses.” (Joshua 11:19-20)*** From other scriptures we learn why God purposed to destroy utterly the Canaanites: it was because of their awful wickedness and corruption.

Similarly, we read in ***2 Thessalonians 2:11-12*** ***“And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”*** The fulfillment of the scriptures is yet future, friends, but what God did to the Jews of old, He is yet going to do to Christendom. And just as the Jews of Christ's day despised His testimony, and in consequence were blinded, so will guilty

Christendom, which has rejected the truth, shall yet have sent them from God a strong delusion, that they may believe a lie.

This is Fred Phelps, Pastor of Westboro Baptist Church. Next week, the LORD willing, at this same time, more of the same. And now, peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the father and the LORD Jesus Christ, and grace be with all them that love our LORD Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Amen.