

# Wrath and Mercy

by Christopher Love

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*God has ordained men to salvation and has decreed that only a small remnant shall obtain it, but this is no ground for us to have hard thoughts of Him.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 1:9, Luke 10:20, John 10:28, Romans 8:30, Ephesians 1:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:9, James 1:17, 1 Peter 1:2, 2 Peter 1:10, Revelation 2:17

**Topics:** "Predestination", "Sanctification"

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## Description

Christopher Love preaches on the doctrine of predestination, emphasizing that those appointed by God for salvation can be assured of their election and should strive to make it sure through sanctification and obedience. He refutes the idea that a person can be certain of damnation, highlighting God's unchangeable decrees and the assurance of salvation for the elect. Love explains that God's decrees are limited to a small number of mankind, yet this does not make Him cruel, but rather showcases His sovereignty and mercy. He concludes by encouraging believers to pray for sanctification and the fruits of predestination, as the work of election is already completed.

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## Transcript

"For God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thessalonians 5:9

In order to further prosecute this great doctrine of predestination, I shall lay down eight doctrinal conclusions concerning it:

1. A man who is ordained and appointed by God from all eternity to obtain salvation may know that he is so appointed and ordained; not only the Lord knows who are His, but also man may certainly know that he is appointed by God to obtain salvation. But the papists are of another judgment, and look upon this truth (that a man may be certainly sure of his salvation) as very pernicious and presumptuous doctrine. They hold that he can only have a conjectural faith, and not a faith of assurance. But that is a manifest untruth. For why should our Savior bid His disciples "rejoice not so much because the spirits were subject to them, as because their names were written in heaven" (Luke 10:20)? How could they rejoice in this privilege if they were ignorant of it, or could not know that their names were written in the Book of Life? So the apostle says, "having predestinated us unto the adoption of children" (they were assured of their adoption) (Ephesians 1:5). So "to him that overcometh I will give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it"

(Revelation 2:17). The new name here is "regeneration," and the white stone is absolution. They shall have a white stone given them; that is, the Lord shall give them a seal, a pledge in their own hearts, that their sins are forgiven, and that they are brought into a state of grace and salvation, and he who has this white stone shall know that he has it.

But I shall prove and clear this further to you by demonstrating that a man may be assured of his election, and that for these reasons: (1) Because God commands and enjoins men to labor to make their calling and election sure. "Wherefore the rather, brethren," says the apostle, "give all diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10), not sure on God's part, but sure in reference to your knowledge of it; and if it were not a thing attainable, the apostle would never enjoin us to do it. Therefore, it is not a thing impossible, but which may be obtained, and has been obtained by many of God's precious servants.

(2) Other men may have conjectural knowledge of our salvation, as in "knowing brethren beloved, your election of God" (1 Thessalonians 1:4). Paul gave a strong conjecture that the Thessalonians were elect of God. Why, now, if another man may guess so rightly of us, then much more may we be assured of it ourselves. So again, Paul speaking of some of his fellow laborers, says "whose names are in the book of life" (Philippians 4:3). If others may know that our names are in the book of life, then much more ourselves. We may be sure of our vocation, and, if so, then may we also be sure of our election. For effectual vocation is an infallible mark of our election (Romans 8:30). And that we may be sure of our vocation the Scripture often mentions, and this is the first doctrinal conclusion: those who are elected and appointed by God to obtain salvation may know and be fully assured that they are so appointed.

2. No man can assuredly know that he is elected and appointed by God to obtain salvation by climbing and searching into the decrees and secrets of God. For "who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counselor?" (Romans 11:34). But we are to search and find it out by the efficacy of the decrees of God upon our hearts. If we find those fruits and effects of election upon our hearts that accompany those who are elected, then we may conclude that we are elected. The Apostle Peter says, "give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." Election was before calling, but here calling is put before election to note that, though election is before vocation, yet a man cannot prove his election by his vocation; and therefore if you have or feel in your own heart your effectual vocation, from thence you may undoubtedly conclude your election, "for whom He did predestinate, them He hath also called" (Romans 8:30). We may know our election as it is operative and efficacious upon our hearts in carrying us on in all the ways of new obedience. We must first prove our vocation, and then by that our election. If you do not try your election, and prove it by your sanctification, your feelings that you are elect are at best the wild conjectures, fond persuasions, enthusiastic delusions, and bold presumptions of a deceived heart.

3. Though a man may know, and ought to know, that he is elected and appointed by God to obtain salvation, yet he ought not to know, nay, he cannot know that he is appointed unto wrath. A man may make his election sure, but he cannot make his reprobation and damnation sure. We find some men in Scripture who have been sure of their election, but none who have been sure of their damnation. A man who runs on in wicked and sinful courses may say that he is not called, but he cannot say he is not elect; no, not the wickedest man in the world (unless he has sinned the sin against ( the Holy Ghost), for though he may run on a long time in sinful and pernicious courses, yet God may at last call him home to Himself.

4. God's decrees and appointments touching men's future estates and conditions are irrevocable and unalterable. "The foundation of God standeth sure" (2 Timothy 2:19), that is, the decrees and purpose of God touching man's salvation are unchangeable; they stand sure. If the law of the Medes and Persians

was so absolute that it could not be reversed, then much less can the decrees of God be reversed. No man who is not elect can be elect, and no man who is elect can be damned. "This is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all those which He hath given Me I should lose none" (John 6:39). There is not one of them lost who were given unto Christ by God's decree (Romans 11:22). God has not cast away His people which He foreknew; those whom God first purposed to bring to eternal life He cast away none of them.

But the papists and others strongly oppose this doctrine, and look upon the decrees of God as mutable and various; and at this day this opinion breaks out among us. There are many who hold that the decrees of God are changeable, and there are three places of Scripture they allege to prove it. The first is that in John where Christ says to His disciples, "Have not I chosen twelve, and one of you is a devil?" From this they argue that all those who are chosen of God shall not obtain salvation by Him.

There is a twofold choosing: There is an external and an internal choosing, and between these you must distinguish. Where Christ says, "Have not I chosen twelve?" He speaks there of an external choosing to the office of the apostleship. Judas was not chosen in God's eternal decree of election, for he was the son of perdition, and hell was his own place, but only externally to be an apostle.

Another place of Scripture they allege against the immutability of God's decrees is that in Exodus 32:32, where Moses prays that if God would not forgive the sins of the people He should "blot out his name out of his book. And the Lord said unto him, 'Whoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out My book' " (Exodus 32:33). Now, they say, if the names of those who are written in God's book of life may be blotted out, then the decrees of God are changeable. So it is said, "that if any man shall take from the words of the book of this prophecy God shall take away his part out of the book of life" (Revelation 22:19).

I shall answer this objection very briefly. Divines observe that there are several sorts of books attributed to God in Scripture: There is a book of providence: "In Thy book were all my members written" (Psalm 139:16), that is, the book of God's providence. There is a book of God's judgment: "And I saw the dead, small and great stand before God, and the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books" (Revelation 20:12). When Christ shall come to judgment, there shall be a great book of accounts opened wherein all things that are done here upon the earth are recorded. There is a book of life, wherein when any man's name is once written it can never be blotted out again. But the book of life mentioned in Scripture has a double significance. Sometimes by the book of life is meant the eternal decree and purpose of God touching those who shall be saved by Him; and in this sense it is to be taken: in "whose names are in the book of life" (Philippians 4:3). And so "rejoice because your names are written in the book of life" (Luke 10:20). And ordinarily, in the New Testament, the book of life is to be taken for the eternal decree and purpose of God touching those who shall be saved.

There is also a book of life in Scripture which is to be taken not for the eternal decree of God, but for the providences of God, and the special care and preservation of God over His church, the preserving of His people under the wings of His providence. This is called the book of life as in, "whosoever hath sinned against Me, Him will I blot out of My book" (Exodus 32:33); that is, "That man who shall go on in sin perniciously, obstinately, and presumptuously, I will blot his name out of My book"; that is, "I will cast him out of My protection and providence. He shall be an excommunicated man." And in this sense it is taken by Moses when he desired God to blot his name out of His book.

So says God in Ezekiel, "My hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies; they shall not be in the assembly of My people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel"

(Ezekiel 13:9), which is as if He had said, "They shall not be written in the book of life." In this sense, this is to be excommunicated out of the church.

I shall confirm this doctrine to you further by demonstrating that the decrees of God are unchangeable and irrevocable. For were it otherwise. God must be a mutable God, which is directly contrary to what the Scripture affirms of Him, namely that with Him "there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

Jesus Christ (may I say it with reverence) would be a liar and falsify His word if this were not true. For He says, "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:28). Christ would not be as good as His word if any of these who are given Him by His Father should be lost, or any of those who are appointed to salvation should come short of it.

If the decrees of God were mutable, then Paul's golden chain in Romans 8:30 would be broken; "Whom He did predestinate them also called, and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He also glorified."

5. The decrees of God in reference to salvation runs but to the smallest number of mankind in the world. God's decrees touching the ordaining of men to life runs but to a very small remnant. The world of unbelievers is like a flock of goats, very numerous, whereas the elect of God are but like sheep scattered here and there upon the mountains. The wicked are like weeds that grow everywhere, but the godly are trees of righteousness of Christ's own planting, planted but very sparingly in the world. Christ's flock is but a very little flock in comparison of the world. There is but a remnant according to the election of grace, a very small remnant that shall obtain salvation; the rest are hardened.

6. Though the decrees of God in reference to men's salvation extend but to a very few, yet this is no ground at all for us to have hard thoughts of God, or to look upon Him as cruel and unmerciful. The reasons of this were in part hinted at before: (1) Because God is not bound to save any, and therefore it is no act of cruelty or injustice in Him that He saves so few. (2) God has a sovereignty over all His creatures. He may do with them what He pleases, and none can say unto Him, "What doest Thou?" (3) The Lord would have shown more mercy when He saved but one man in the world than He would have done rigor of justice had He condemned all, because all have sinned and thereby deserved damnation, and God is not bound to save any of them. (4) God has dealt better with us than He did with the angels that sinned. For you know all the angels in heaven that sinned, in aspiring to be like the Most High, were all thrown down and damned, not one of them being saved, but all reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day. But yet, notwithstanding, though all mankind had sinned, and so fell short of the glory of God, yet they were not all condemned, and that because Jesus Christ took upon Himself not the nature of angels, but of man; and therefore, though all the angels that sinned perished, yet though we have all sinned, we do not all perish, but there is a remnant rescued from death and damnation and appointed to obtain salvation.

7. The world fares the better for those very persons who are within the decrees of God to obtain salvation. For, were it not so, God's decree of election that such a number of men should be saved, the world should not have continued to this day, and it shall continue no longer than till the number of the elect are fulfilled. And then the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth and all that is therein shall be burned up. God gives deliverance, safety, and preservation to the world for the elect's sake. We are beholding to the decrees of God, in reference to the elect, that the world continues to this very day. The men of the world

fare better, in regard of the comforts of this life, for the sake of God's elect. The days of affliction that came upon Jerusalem and all Judea was shortened for the elect's sake (Mark 13:20). For their sakes it was that Israel was not made as Sodom, and like unto Gomorrah, that a remnant was left (Isaiah 1:9). So it was, "Thus saith the Lord, 'As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, "Destroy it not for a blessing is in it," so will I do for My servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all' " (Isaiah 65:8). And Job witnesses that an island is delivered by the pureness of the hands (Job 22:30).

8. Last, observe this conclusion: though you are bound to pray for the remission of your sins and the sanctification of your nature, yet you are not bound by God to pray for your election. Why? Because this work is perfectly done already. As we are not to pray for the creation of the world (because that work is perfected), so neither are we to pray for our election, because that work is fully done already. Works perfectly done we are not to pray for. But we must pray for those effects and fruits of predestination and election, such as vocation, sanctification, remission, regeneration, and the like, but not for election.

#### Application

We come now to the application, and the use that I shall make of what has been said shall be first by way of information and trial, that you may know whether you are in the number of those that are appointed by God to salvation or not, and then by way of consolation and comfort in the next sermon.

If you are within the decrees of God for salvation, then sooner or later God will cause the power of His Word to come with authority and conviction upon your conscience, as in "knowing brethren beloved, (says the apostle) your election of God, for our gospel came not to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost" (1 Thessalonians 1:4--5). The Word will come with power and conviction upon your consciences sooner or later if you belong to the election of grace.

You shall sooner or later be effectually called, for whom God has predestinated, them He will also call (Romans 8:30).

If the Lord has ordained you unto salvation, He will beget and increase sanctification in you. Likewise, you are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus" (1 Peter 1:2). All the elect of God shall have the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon their hearts, sooner or later.

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