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SERMON XXI.

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DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE.

ROMANS 8:29,30. *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

THAT all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ shall inherit eternal life, is a sentiment in which all denominations of Christians are agreed. All who acknowledge the divinity and the atonement of the holy Redeemer are cordially united in adoring him as the true God, and eternal life. It is well known, however, that there is a diversity of opinions among Christians concerning the plan of salvation, and some of the important and precious doctrines which are comprised in it. For this reason it may be seasonable and profitable to endeavor to exhibit correct and scriptural views of the great leading principles which belong to the scheme of God's saving mercy, as every doctrine connected with it must be acknowledged to be highly interesting, and *essentially* important.

The apostle Paul bestowed much labor in stating and explaining the mysterious and controverted doctrines of divine sovereignty and grace. His epistle to the church at Rome, in which the text is contained, is wholly employed in discussing, illustrating, and confirming some of the deepest and most difficult points in divinity. It contains the most satisfactory elucidation, and the ablest defence, of what are generally called the peculiar doctrines of grace, that has ever been given to the world in so small a compass. In the verses which we have at this time recited, the whole scheme of salvation is brought to view in a very few chosen expressions. In them, we see that golden chain, which, being let down from the everlasting throne of God, (if we may so speak,) is to draw all his chosen people up to heaven, and put

them in full possession of everlasting happiness and glory. This portion of the sacred word evidently contains the following doctrines, viz: God's foreknowledge—eternal election—effectual calling—justification—perseverance in grace—and the eternal glorification of the saints in heaven. Each of these important and interesting topics might afford ample matter for a separate discourse.

The subject which I propose to discuss on the present occasion, is, **THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.**

To treat of the foreknowledge of God, as it relates particularly the *plan of redemption*, and to the *salvation of his chosen people* is intended. That God has devised and in his word revealed to mankind a plan of salvation, we presume will not be controverted. That infinite wisdom, (which our reason necessarily leads us to ascribe to God,) brings us naturally to the conclusion, that whatever is done by his agency or ordering, is brought to pass in consequence of, and agreeably to his own sovereign, benevolent, and wise determination. God's gracious purpose to save a number of Adam's apostate race from sin, and from perdition, we call his plan of salvation. When God devised the plan of salvation, he viewed the whole human family as lying in the ruins of an apostate condition. He viewed sinners of mankind as being not only in a state of guilt and misery, but in such a state of enmity against every thing spiritually good, that if left to themselves, they would be disposed to reject the provisions of sovereign mercy, even when made and tendered to their acceptance. Now it appears from evident fact, that multitudes of the human family have never had that enmity of heart subdued or removed. And on the other hand, comfortable *facts* occur, which demonstrate that some sinners, by the efficacy of sovereign grace, are brought to lay down the weapons of their carnal warfare, and to embrace, with gratitude and joy, the precious overtures of divine love. These things were all in the view of the omniscient mind when the plan of salvation was devised. God, we must believe, had a perfect foreknowledge of every descendant of fallen Adam, that ever would turn to him by sincere repentance for his sins, and would embrace with cordial faith the provisions of his saving mercy. We argue this point from a principle to which all parties subscribe, that is, "that the sinner's conversion is the work of God." If it is by God's sovereign agency, that the sinner is converted, we think the inference fair and undeniable, that he *knew beforehand all those sinners* of the human family whom he determined to convert. This conclusion, we must arrive at, unless we could admit the unreasonable supposition, that an infinitely wise God does not certainly foreknow, and predetermine his own acts. It must appear entirely consonant to reason, and to the infinite wisdom of the Divine Being, that he should in every instance have predetermined, and, therefore, foreknown, whom he would convert. This is what we

mean, and all that we mean, by the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, as it relates to the plan of his mercy in the salvation of mankind.

We are well aware, that in view of this doctrine, many serious persons are perplexed with great difficulties, and some have not only doubted the truth of the doctrine of divine foreknowledge, but flatly contradicted and denied it. We will, therefore, endeavor to solve the difficulties which are connected with the doctrine, that the pious, humble christian, may have rational, consistent, and comfortable views of it; and that those by whom it may have been exploded and condemned, may be induced to examine it again, and satisfy themselves—that there are indeed no evidences of its falsity either in the bible, or in the principles of *sound* and *unbiassed reason*. In our observations we shall endeavor carefully to avoid giving any offence to those brethren in Christ, who differ from us in opinion.

The difficulties which attend the subject of God's foreknowledge, arise, principally, from the indistinct and erroneous views which have been entertained in relation to it, and the serious and shocking inferences which have been thought to be deducible from it.

1. A difficulty arises from not being able to perceive, if God foreknows the conversion of a part of mankind, because in the eternal purpose of his grace, he predetermined to convert them, how he is to be freed from the imputation of *partiality* in not having predetermined to convert all men. This is one of those deep mysteries of the *sovereign* dispensations of God, which we are free to acknowledge we cannot fathom, and which we do not pretend to be able fully to explain. Some considerations, however, we trust, can be offered, which may serve to cast some light upon the doctrine of divine foreknowledge, and cause the pious and candid christian to view it in a more favorable manner.

We can have no reasonable objection to the doctrine of divine foreknowledge, if we reflect that God certainly has wisdom and goodness enough to enable him to manage all the affairs of his moral government, and of his kingdom of grace according to the unerring standard of moral rectitude. From the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, we may certainly conclude that he never formed *one purpose*—and that he never will perform *one act*, which are not entirely consistent with the infinite perfection of his own character, and with the best interests of his universal kingdom. The conversion and salvation of sinners is on all hands acknowledged to be a work of God, and a work worthy of his sovereign wisdom and benevolence to determine and to accomplish. Christians of every denomination are agreed in praying for the conversion of sinners, and also agree in professing to believe that God alone can convert them. We believe it is right for God to convert and save sinners, that it is an illustrious display of the riches of his grace; *how* will we go about to prove, then, that it is not *right* for God to form an *intention* or to entertain

a *purpose* to perform this glorious and desirable work of conversion? It cannot be wrong for God to intend to perform a good action. We cannot see any good reason why God, who must by all be believed to have existed from eternity, might not consistently with his infinitely perfect character, have formed an *eternal purpose to display his mercy in the conversion and salvation of sinners*. If so, he might and did also *foreknow* that a certain part of mankind would infallibly be converted and become the subjects of salvation, according to his appointed means. If God be omniscient, the conclusion is inevitable.

But, perhaps, some may think, and say, that we have implicated our Maker in the serious charge of partiality. This difficulty we will humbly endeavor to obviate. We trust it can be successfully shown that God's foreknowledge of those whom he will convert and save, furnishes no evidence that there is any partiality connected with his sovereign plan of mercy.

It is admitted, and believed on all hands, that the whole race of Adam, are by nature in a state of sin, that every individual is under a just sentence of condemnation, and liable to all the pains and penalties of God's violated covenant. Now admitting the supposition, that God, according to his sovereign purpose and grace, did from eternity predetermine to convert from a life of sin, and save with an everlasting salvation in heaven, a part of the apostate family of Adam, what injury has been done by this his gracious purpose, to the remaining part? If God has determined to shew unmerited favor to the elect, in recovering them from the ruins of their apostate condition, by regeneration and efficacious grace, how does it appear that the mercy which he manifests to them, serves in any sense to render the *remaining part* of mankind more guilty or more miserable than they would have been, if none had been saved? Does the grace bestowed upon the regenerate, throw any obstacle in the way of the conversion of those whose natural depravity inclines them voluntarily to continue in impenitence, and to live without God in the world? Does it render the salvation of the careless and impenitent, more difficult or more hopeless in any respect than it would have been, if all had been left unregenerate and suffered to perish? The intelligent christian must give these questions a negative reply. Some good people have another way of solving the difficulty attending the subjects of God's foreknowledge and election. According to their views, God's plan is to *give to all men such a measure of grace as will be sufficient, if they duly improve it to insure their salvation*. But this allegation only serves to involve the subject in a new difficulty;—a difficulty fully as great, as that which was intended to be obviated. For since all sinners do not become the subjects of converting grace, which is a fact too obvious and certain to admit of controversy, it still remains to assign some reason why some sinners are converted and saved by God's sovereign and efficacious grace, while others

no worse by nature than they, are suffered to live and die unconverted, and to perish in that everlasting perdition to which all in strict justice were obnoxious. Here we would ask the humble and devout christian, who has made him to differ from hundreds of his acquaintances, who appeared to him to be less wicked, than he was before his conversion to God? Did God convert him by his efficacious grace, while he did not exert the same gracious influence upon his unconverted neighbors and acquaintances? Or is the difference to be ascribed to this, that he of himself did more towards effecting his own salvation than his fellow-men, who are still unconverted, ever did towards effecting their salvation? No, verily; the truly spiritual, humble, and experienced christian will give quite a different answer to these inquiries. He will acknowledge that his conversion was effected only, and entirely by the free, sovereign grace of God. He is fully sensible that there was nothing good in his heart, until he was savingly operated upon by the influences of the Holy Spirit. His doctrine, of course, is that of the apostle Paul: "By the grace of God I am what I am." Christians of all denominations will unite in these sentiments, but if you allege to some good people that God had *formed a purpose* to convert them, before he did do so, and that he foreknew their conversion as an event which accorded with this his gracious purpose, they immediately become alarmed, lest the Divine Being by such a mode of representing things should appear partial in not having determined to convert and save all men. They forget that he is not under obligations to save any. It is a fact, however, which cannot be controverted, that all men are not saved, and we think there is as great an obligation *upon one christian* denomination as *another* to show, if it really be so, that this fact is not in accordance with the impartial benevolence of the great moral Governor of the Universe. At any rate, it will be exceedingly difficult to prove that this fact was not an object of the foreknowledge of God. Now, when we see evidence of the conversion of some sinners, while a multitude of others, who enjoy the same religious advantages, remain spiritually blind and hardened in impenitence, and find ourselves unable to account for the difference, why may not we, after the example of our blessed Saviour, resolve it into the sovereign will and good pleasure of our heavenly Father, believing the dispensation to be a righteous one, because it takes place under the government of an infinitely wise and holy God. We acknowledge we can assign no reason why God converts some sinners, and not others. The fact is incontrovertible, unless we adopt the principle of universal salvation, and one denomination of christians may as easily account for it as another. The mystery is alike puzzling both to Calvinists and Arminians, and we must think it would be the wisdom of both parties to abide by the solution furnished by our infallible Saviour, and say, "even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." If we find such a

state of things existing under the government of a God of infinite wisdom and goodness, we should beware how we construe his sovereign dispensations. Our duty seems to be not to explain what God does or permits, but to adore his sovereign wisdom and boundless goodness, which we see displayed in all his works, and in all his dispensations. The conversion of a sinner is a work of God. Christians of every religious denomination agree in declaring it a work of divine grace. All esteem it a glorious and good work, and unite in praising God for its performance. Why cannot all the dear people of Christ be united in believing and acknowledging that it was an instance of the infinite benevolence of God that he should have determined to accomplish this glorious work? Was it not right that a God of infinite goodness should have formed an intention to convert and save all those sinners who are found turning to him by sincere repentance? Can there be any reasonable objection to his having formed that gracious purpose from eternity? Now if God from eternity, consistently with his infinite goodness, might have formed a purpose to perform the good and glorious work of converting some sinners, then we think there is no danger or absurdity in believing that he might and did foreknow every individual person whom he had purposed that he would convert and save.

2. In the view of God, say some, all duration, past, present, and future, make but one eternal now; therefore, there is neither foreknowledge nor after-knowledge with God; all things from eternity to eternity being always alike present to him. There is some show of plausibility in this mode of speaking, but it is very easy to shew its fallacy and inconclusiveness. To say that all things past, present, and future, are one eternal now in the view of God, will, we think, be far, very far indeed, from disproving his foreknowledge. Rightly viewed, it must evidently appear to be one of the strongest and most conclusive proofs of that doctrine. For upon the very supposition itself, which we do not at all feel disposed to controvert, certainly all future events, at any given period, are as really present to the omniscient mind of God, as though they existed or had taken place at the given time. Even upon the supposition that all duration, past, present, and future, is in the view of God, one eternal now, it would most certainly be fairly implied, that God does always see and know every successive event, because, from the very supposition, he knows the end from the beginning. It is true, there is, strictly speaking, no succession in God's being, or in his knowledge, but it is evident that creatures come into being successively, and that those events which have a relation to the state and condition of created beings, mankind for instance, those events which relate to their moral existence, and their happiness take place, are brought about successively. They do not all take place at the same time, but are brought about or produced at different and successive parts or periods of duration. Now, it must be

evident, that in whatever part or period of duration any event, or events, take place, that event or those events were always present to the omniscient mind of the infinite Jehovah. Upon this very principle, to which all seem agreed, God must be viewed in every part or period of duration as possessing, (if we may so term it,) a perfect, present knowledge of all events, past, present, and future. God has as perfect a knowledge at any given period of those events, which at that period are yet future, as of those which at the period supposed are already past. This plain consideration, establishes incontrovertibly the doctrine of divine foreknowledge. The circumstance of all duration being one eternal now, in the view of God, will most evidently imply that his knowledge embraces all future, as well as all past, and all present things. Those events which we conceive of as future, are present to his eternal, omniscient mind; therefore, we conclude, that the bible declares the truth where it says, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the creation."

3. But some seem to think, they have discovered a more excellent way. They object to the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, upon ground which appears to us strange indeed. A certain learned, elaborate, and critical commentator* on the Holy Scriptures, has taught that although God is omniscient, *he is not obliged to know* all that he can know, any more than, because he is omnipotent, he is obliged to do all that he can do. Again, the same writer says, perfectly consistent with himself, "*God could know all things, but some things he does not choose to know.*"

We are perfectly astonished, we confess, that any christian divine or philosopher, should ever have conceived, or for one moment entertained in his mind, such an idea of the infinite and omniscient Jehovah. It might have been enough for the philosophers of the dark ages of antiquity, to have represented their supreme divinity Jupiter, as abandoning the exercise of government over the Universe after he had created it, and leaving all events to the direction and management of the *fates*, and as himself reclining at ease upon his throne, without paying any attention to the actions of men, or to any of the numberless events which are continually taking place in all parts of the vast creation. Of the great Creator and providential Governor of the Universe, the intelligent christian, with the bible in his hand, ought to entertain very different conceptions. We cannot believe, nor do we suppose christian brethren can believe, that a God of infinite perfection and rectitude of nature, either is, or possibly can be, indifferent about the moral conduct of the rational creatures he has made, or about those events which are to have a bearing upon their happiness, both in the present and in a future world. But, really, it would seem to us, that if God can know all things, and there are some things which he *does not*

* We suppose the author alludes to the late Dr. Adam Clarke.—Ed.

choose to know, then he must in a partial degree at least, be indifferent about attending to the moral conduct of his rational creatures, as well as about extending his superintending care and management to those numberless providential occurrences, every one of which have some connection with the interest and the happiness of his great moral kingdom. Surely, if God has a regard to the good of the universe, which has been brought into existence at the command of his creating word, he cannot feel indifferent in relation to the smallest circumstance, or event by which the interest or the happiness of any of his creatures is to be affected. His infinite benevolence, we must conclude, would determine him to *choose to know*, attend to, and manage every event, even the most minute, and to human view trivial, in such a manner as to make all subservient to the advancement and accomplishment of his wise and benevolent plans. According to the doctrine of our blessed Saviour, the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and not a sparrow can fall to the ground without our heavenly Father. Does not this most plainly teach us that every event is noticed, attended to, and of course, is intimately and particularly known by the omniscient God, whose kingdom both of providence and grace "ruleth over all?" It is a matter so plain, so self-evident, that we can see no necessity for any formal proof or comment. We cannot but esteem it passing strange, how any person who believes in the infinite perfections of God, of which his infinite omniscience is one, should ever have conceived the idea of denying the doctrine of divine foreknowledge. "Known unto God," must reason say, as well as the bible, "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the creation." His knowledge extends to all creatures, and to all events from eternity unto eternity. An over-strained solicitude to get clear of the doctrine of predestination, must have led our christian brethren to deny that a Being of infinite omniscience, was in every sense, possessed of the attribute of foreknowledge.

But we find the same idea extended and enlarged upon, in the writings of the learned commentator to whom we have alluded above, and the more he enlarges upon it, to us it appears the more absurd and inconsistent. After having asserted that God can know all things, but some things he does not choose to know, he goes on further to remark, "some things he (God) has thought proper to poise upon the possibility of being, or not being; leaving it to the will of intelligent beings to turn the scale." These we cannot but esteem very strange assertions to be made by any person who has been blessed with the light of divine revelation, or who possesses the most moderate portion of common sense. Let us examine them seriously and impartially.

"God can know all things; but there are some things which he does not choose to know." To say that God cannot know all things would be too barefaced an absurdity; therefore, it

seems to be that his power of knowing all things is admitted. But some things God does not choose to know. We would be very much obliged to our good friends if they would give us some reason why God does not choose to know some things. Is it because they are good things, or because they are evil, or is it because they are in their nature so indifferent that they are not likely to have any serious bearing upon the interests of his great moral kingdom in any respect? How is God himself, (with reverence we desire to make the inquiry,) to become acquainted with the nature or the tendencies of things which he does not choose to know? It would seem to us that *he must know things*, in order to his determining whether it is proper for him to know them or not. If God has chosen not to know some things, without giving them so much attention as to understand their nature and tendency, then he has made a choice, or he has exercised a volition without having any reason for it. But this seems to be a supposition utterly repugnant to all just ideas of the infinite wisdom of the Deity. We have always been led to believe that God has infinitely wise reasons for every volition he makes, and for every act he performs. We think it reasonable, too, that the Divine Being should possess a perfect knowledge of all things, in order to his forming a determination what things he would choose to know, and what not. It was necessary he should foreknow all things in such a manner, as to understand their true nature, that he might make a proper and wise choice in relation to the things he would determine to know.

If we say, again, that God has chosen to leave some things to be poised in the scale of being, by the will of intelligent creatures, we would ask as in the former instance, are they good things, or evil things, or is it to God a matter of indifference what is their real nature? Can we for a moment, seriously believe that indifference of this kind can be imputable to a Being of infinite wisdom and benevolence? Must not all the actions of the creatures, whether good or evil, have an important bearing upon the state of the universe? Must not every event be either propitious or disastrous in its tendency, according to its specific nature? Must not every creature, then, that God brings into existence, have either a good or a bad influence upon the state of the rational universe, according to the true moral character which pertains to it? And must not all the actions of the creatures be the occasion either of good or evil, of happiness, or of misery to the universe, according as those actions are in themselves of a good, or an evil tendency? Under such a view of things, can we suffer ourselves for one moment to believe or to admit the thought that there should be one single being in existence, the existence and the character of which is not known to God? Or can we suppose that there is a single action done by any of his creatures of which he would choose to remain ignorant? Such a supposition is manifestly inconsistent with the infinite wisdom

and goodness of God. We cannot but think it a much more rational idea, and more worthy the character of an infinitely wise and benevolent Being, who is good *essentially*, and is disposed to *do only good*, to represent him as attentively and wisely poising the scale of being, with his own unerring hand; and as ordering and directing all events in such a way as to maintain perfect order, and to produce the largest sum of happiness throughout his universal kingdom. If God is infinitely good, he must be disposed to have a wise regard to the good of his creatures. He must *choose* to know, attend to, and manage, by his own immediate agency, all events in all parts of his vast dominion, and through all duration, in such a manner as to manifest to the whole rational universe, the glory of his own wisdom, power, and goodness, and in the best possible way to promote the general interest of the universe. We can never reconcile it to our ideas of the infinite goodness, wisdom, and rectitude, of the great moral Governor of the universe, to suppose that there are or can be any events upon which he shuts his eyes, with careless indifference, and voluntarily determines not to know whether they shall happen or not. We cannot admit that there is any thing left undetermined in the Divine plan, any thing to be governed by chance, or any thing, even of the most trivial nature, left to be poised in the scale of being, or not being, by the will of intelligent creatures. We adopt the principle advanced by the royal Psalmist of Israel, contained in this declaration: "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens: and his kingdom ruleth *over all*." According to the doctrine of our blessed Saviour, too, so general, and so minute are the attentions which the providence of our heavenly Father gives to every event, and every circumstance, even the least, which takes place, that not a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed or unregarded. This doctrine of our Saviour, we think, must be much more comfortable to a good man, than a scheme which will leave any thing contingent. Any thing, even the most trivial, to be poised in the great scale of events by any hand, but that of God himself. No: blessed be God, this important, this truly interesting subject is involved in no dark uncertainty. Known unto God, our adorable Sovereign, are all his works and all his dispensations from the beginning of the world. He created all things for himself, for the manifestation of his own glory, and he will most certainly so order, overrule, and direct all things, that they shall infallibly answer the end for which he created them. We believe, therefore, on scriptural and rational ground, in opposition to the hypothesis of that learned commentator, to whom we have alluded above, and whose opinion is followed by some of our beloved brethren in the Lord—we believe that God chooses to know all things that exist, and all events that take place in all parts of the vast creation, in order that he may manage and direct them for the manifestation of his own glory, and the best interests of his great moral kingdom. We believe, as the bible

teaches, that God works "all things according to the counsel of his own will;" that it is his sovereign prerogative to know the end from the beginning. On this ground, we believe and affirm that God knew all things from eternity, which is the same as to affirm that he foreknew all things.

II. We will now proceed to advance a few quotations from the holy scriptures, in *proof* and *illustration* of the doctrine of God's foreknowledge.

This doctrine is to be found in almost every page of the bible. The sacred writers use no reserve on the subject. They appear to assume it as a principle which does not admit of controversy, that God foreknew all things. They advance this doctrine on every pertinent occasion without ceremony, and frequently without illustration. They advance no arguments or reasonings to prove it. They offer no apology for alluding to it, but evidently appear to consider it as a plain, common sense principle, which no impartial reflecting person can dispute.

The first proof we shall adduce of the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, you will find in Acts, 15:18. In this part of the history of the primitive church, we find the apostle James addressing an ecclesiastical council, which had convened at Jerusalem, to discuss and settle a question which had arisen relative to the circumcision of the believing gentiles. In the course of his remarks, the apostle takes occasion to observe, that all the works of God are known to him from eternity. In this observation he evidently alludes to the conversion of the Gentiles, an event which he affirmed to have been predicted by some of the ancient prophets, and of which it is clear that he is here speaking as being an event foreknown of God. The conversion of the idolatrous Gentiles the apostle justly considered as forming a leading and very important part of the dispensation of the grace of God towards the children of men. It was this work of God's grace, of which he was here particularly speaking, and without hesitation represents God as knowing from eternity, that he would extend his mercy to the Gentiles, and in due time call them into his church. This text then affords proof, conclusive and unanswerable, that God certainly foreknows all things; not excepting those events, which, to human view, would appear to be mere contingencies.

Again, we find the doctrine of God's foreknowledge advanced by the apostle Peter. This holy and eminent servant of Jesus Christ, in a public discourse which he delivered on the day of pentecost, in vindication of himself and his fellow-disciples, against the unreasonable cavils of the unbelieving Jews, boldly and plainly charged them with having crucified Jesus of Nazareth. The Jews had apprehended him, and had induced Pilate, the Roman Governor, to pass sentence of death upon him, and then, the Roman soldiers with wicked hands had crucified and slain him. This cruel and barbarous deed, Peter unhesitatingly charged home upon the consciences of the malicious Jews; but at the same time, observes, they had done it according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. The Greek word, which in this instance is translated foreknowledge, according to some learned critics, properly signifies decree. The apostle, then, was of opinion that God not only foreknew, but that he also had decreed this great, and in its consequences, truly important event, for the most wise, righteous, and merciful purposes; and had,

moreover, inspired his holy prophets to predict it many ages before it was actually accomplished.

Yet God's foreknowledge of the crucifixion of the holy Saviour, and his sovereign decree concerning it, was no excuse for the malicious Jews, or for the barbarous soldiers in perpetrating that deed of atrocious cruelty and wickedness. God's foreseeing the event, and decreeing to *permit* it, and to *overrule* it in such a way as to render it the means of the salvation of sinners, and of manifesting in an eminent degree the glory of his own divine character and perfections, had *no necessary influence* upon the will of those who chose and determined to crucify the Saviour. Their own wicked tempers instigated them to put him to death. God, according to the ideas and the doctrine of Peter, foreknew, and inspired his prophets to predict that the wicked Jews would crucify the Messiah, and by his infinitely wise and benevolent decree determined to make their malicious act the means of salvation to his believing people. The apostle appears in this instance to have advanced the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, as a self-evident truth, of which no rational person would think of requiring formal proof. Indeed, we are at a loss to conceive how any rational person, who believes in the infinite perfections of the eternal Jehovah, should ever have conceived the idea of denying his attribute of foreknowledge.

In the quotations which we shall further make, we will have regard to two leading ideas. The *first*, taken from the consideration that God is the great moral Governor of the universe, by whom the plan of man's salvation was devised, decreed, and accomplished. The *second*, derived from the *prophecies* which we find in the sacred books.

1. The great plan of God's providential kingdom comprehends all the events which have ever taken place, or ever will take place in any and in every part of his vast dominion. If, then, the doctrine of St. Paul be true, in which he teaches us that God "worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will," he not only must have a perfect foreknowledge of every *event* before it takes place, but likewise of every *circumstance* in any way connected with its accomplishment. Without such foreknowledge, with reverence we would desire to make the affirmation, God would not be competent to the government of the universe. The great leading facts recorded in the bible relative to our salvation, afford conclusive and irrefragable proof of God's perfect foreknowledge of all things. The fact of a Saviour having been chosen, appointed, and "set up from everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was," which is the language of the bible, is an undeniable evidence that God foreknew the revolt of our first parents; that he foreknew the temptation by which they would be seduced, and the very act of eating the forbidden fruit, by which they would transgress the covenant, and involve themselves and all their posterity in guilt and misery. The fact of the Son of God making his appearance in the world in the fulness of time, as the prophets had predicted, of his being made of the seed of Abraham, and of the lineage of David, according to the genealogical descent of both his parents, and of his being born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, affords evidence incontestible, that every person included in the line of ancestry^o of the blessed Saviour, as well as all the leading circumstances belonging to the history of each, and every individual included in the long list, were all perfectly plain in the view of the omniscient Jehovah

from the ages of eternity, and every thing took place in perfect accordance with the counsels of his eternal wisdom and foreordination, and of course, agreeably to his divine prescience and sovereign determination. Of these truths no one can entertain the smallest doubt who will seriously reflect that the attribute of omniscience is essential to an infinite mind. Once more; the fact of the benevolent Saviour having suffered the pains of the cross, to make an atonement for the sins of his people, and his crucifixion being declared to be by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, is another conclusive proof, that all the leading and important events connected with the great and glorious plan of the salvation of God's chosen people, were predetermined and foreknown. It affords a most interesting and conclusive proof, that he has done and suffered all that God foreknew and predetermined, in order to secure the salvation of his chosen people. We have already spoken of the doctrine of the apostle Peter in relation to this matter, but we would beg leave to repeat an argument so peculiarly appropriate. He teaches us, expressly, that the crucifixion of our blessed Saviour was an event, which took place in accordance with the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. He foreknew the event itself, and all the circumstances leading to it, and connected with it; and we have reason to believe, he wisely appointed, overruled, and determined every thing in that way, which he saw would be best calculated to manifest his own glory, and to effect the salvation and happiness of his chosen people.

2. We observe that the scriptures of truth establish the doctrine of God's foreknowledge by the *numerous prophecies* which we find in the sacred books. Every prophecy in the bible is an undeniable evidence of the foreknowledge of God. Without the inspiration of the Almighty, the prophets would have been as ignorant of the events of futurity as other men. God could not have inspired the prophets with the knowledge of future events, if those events had not been foreknown by him. If the Divine Being, then, had not possessed the attribute of foreknowledge, the bible could not have contained those inimitably sublime and interesting predictions of the holy prophets, which serve to nourish the faith and promote the edification of the humble disciple of Jesus Christ. Our first parents must have lived and died destitute of that precious consolation which they found in the first promise of mercy, in which it was predicted, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, if the God of mercy had not foreknown and decreed the accomplishment of that important and glorious event. That remarkable and interesting prediction which gave assurance to the patriarch Abraham, that in his seed "all nations of the earth should be blessed," never could have been recorded in the bible, if God had not predetermined and foreknown that the divine Messiah should be numbered amongst his descendants, and that through his divine mediation, and the successful administration of his kingdom of grace, millions of the Gentile nations, as well as the chosen tribes of Israel, should in due time be blessed with all spiritual and divine blessings. It was also in accordance, as we have reason to believe, with the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of the everlasting Jehovah, that the same promissory blessing was pronounced successively upon the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, and was made a source of the richest consolation to them, and to every pious believing Israelite, who lived under that dispensation of the church which preceded the advent of the Saviour into the world.

But it would require much time and patience to quote *all* those important promises and predictions which relate to the merciful dealings of God towards his chosen people, and to the complete development of his plan of grace for their salvation. To do this, would be to adduce every gracious promise recorded in the bible—all those divine predictions which relate to the birth of the divine Saviour—to his sufferings and death—to his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension to that glorious heaven, where he dwelt in light and joy ineffable with the eternal Father before the world was created. It would also be necessary to speak of the very signal success of the gospel during the age which immediately succeeded the ascension of the blessed Saviour, and had been foretold by David, some centuries before the birth of Christ, in that inspired and sublime song, in which he celebrates the ascension of Christ with power and great glory to the heavenly Zion, and the illustrious spiritual gifts he should thence pour down upon men. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." In such sublime and eloquent strains does the holy prophet predict the glorious success of the gospel and kingdom of the risen and ascended Saviour. We would, moreover, be required to mention, as a subject of scripture prophecy, the preservation of the church of Christ, from age to age, notwithstanding the plots and machinations of her enemies, by which they have labored, and still are laboring to overthrow her. Thus we see fulfilled our Saviour's comfortable prediction: "On this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." And yet, again, we would have to notice the final glorious triumph, which, according to the "sure word of prophecy," the exalted Redeemer is destined to obtain over the prince of this world, and all his impious confederates, and the universal extension and establishment of his kingdom of grace and righteousness over the whole earth. In this extended and wonderful chain of events, how many things do we find, which to human calculation, would have appeared utterly improbable? How many events predicted as certainly to be accomplished, which men would call contingencies, which yet were so many essential constituent parts of God's general plan of grace, and each one necessary in some respect to its accomplishment? Surely, when we contemplate that almost countless multitude of events, in relation to the redemption of God's chosen people, recorded in the pages of the sacred volume, not one of which could have been foreknown by the prophet who predicted it, independently of divine inspiration, we must feel a full conviction that it requires that all comprehending intuition which sees the end from the beginning, and which can be the attribute of none but an infinite mind, to enable the omniscient Jehovah himself, (with reverence we would express it,) to communicate to his holy prophets the knowledge of the things which they from time to time have foretold. As a plain and undeniable consequence, then, the doctrine of God's foreknowledge is confirmed and illustrated by every prophecy recorded in the bible.

In order to see in a clearer and stronger light, the force of the argument in proof of the foreknowledge of God derived from the prophecies of holy writ, it may be useful to select some one special prediction in which some distant future event is foretold and specified, which nothing in the aspect of divine providence could have enabled the most sagacious

person to conjecture. In general we must be sensible that in relation to things which are to take place in distant futurity, all men are alike unknowing. Not one of us can foresee the events of to-morrow. Independently of divine inspiration, one person can know and tell as much about future events as another. The prophet in Israel who predicted, several ages before the birth of king Josiah, that the idolatrous altar reared by Jeroboam should be demolished by a man of that name, could no more have foreknown or predicted that event, without divine inspiration, than any other Israelite who lived in the same age. God himself, who foreknew the event, and had predetermined it, revealed it to the prophet, and hence it was that he was enabled to foresee and predict it. To adduce another instance: the prophet Isaiah by inspiration foretold that in one hundred years after his time, the illustrious Cyrus would be raised up by divine Providence to liberate the Jews from their captivity of seventy years in Babylon, rebuild their demolished temple, and reinstate them in the full enjoyment of all their ancient privileges. These remarkable and important events could be known to God alone, so long before their accomplishment; God revealed them to his holy prophet, and hence it was that Isaiah was enabled to predict them, for the encouragement and consolation of the church of God in his day. Without the inspiration of that omniscient God, who sees the end from the beginning, the prophet could no more have foreknown or foretold that such a personage as Cyrus would be raised up for such important purposes, and should render such signal services to the cause of God and to the interests of his church, than one of us could have foreknown, if we had lived a century previous to the present age of important revolutions and changes, both in the civil and religious world, that the circumstance of an obscure clergyman of the principality Wales in England, making application to some charitable friends in the city of London for a few bibles to supply the poor in his congregation and neighborhood with the word of life, should be destined by divine Providence to give rise to that noble and truly important and useful institution, the British and Foreign Bible Society, established in London, and to all those kindred institutions in Europe, and in America, also, by whose benevolent instrumentality, it is to be hoped, all the nations of the earth will in a few years be enlightened and regenerated.

1. We infer from the doctrine of divine foreknowledge, that there are no events which in the view of God are, properly speaking, *contingent*, or accidental. God not only foreknew all things from eternity, but he foreknew them as being *absolutely certain* in themselves. To us many things are contingent, because we are ignorant of the causes which have a natural tendency to produce them, or because we could not beforehand have foreseen, from any circumstances known to us, why those particular events should have taken place rather than others. But those things which we view and speak of as contingencies, or connected with the end, are *certain* in the view of God, because he possesses a perfect knowledge of the causes by which every event is to be produced, and is able to calculate with infallible certainty in what result the operation of those causes will terminate. We, therefore, fully, and unhesitatingly adopt a sentiment advanced not long since, that if God foreknows that a thing will take place, that thing certainly *will* and *must* take place. Some of our Christian friends, we know, esteem this the doctrine of fatality, and in that view strenuously object to it; but why should we view the subject

in this light? or why deduce this inference from it? The foreknowledge of God is not to be considered as being the cause of the events which he foreknows, neither is it properly speaking the cause of their fixedness or certainty. God foreknows things because he has determined to *effect them by his own immediate agency*; or, because he has determined to *permit* them under his sovereign control. Both the things which God has decreed to *do*, and those things which he has decreed to *permit*, are in themselves certain and fixed according to his determinate counsel and foreknowledge. Nor can we see that such a declaration implies the idea of fatality, any more than do the words of the devout psalmist, when he makes this solemn asseveration, "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all."

2. Again, we infer from what has been said, that there is a *perfect agreement between God's foreknowledge and his divine purposes, or decrees*. The very circumstance of God's decreeing a certain thing or particular event, necessarily supposes that thing or event to be an object of his foreknowledge. Every thing, therefore, which God has decreed either to bring to pass by his own direct agency, or to permit to take place in the universe, was, from eternity, an object of his knowledge. Yet we are not hence to infer that God is in any sense the author or efficient cause of sin. God, as the apostle James declares, "cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." His decrees in relation to sin have no influence upon men to cause them to sin. They prove, however, that he foreknew men would sin, and that it was his sovereign purpose so to order and overrule all things that the entrance of sin should prove the occasion of manifesting the lustre and glory of his own divine perfections. In relation to these things, as we observed before, there is an exact harmony between God's foreknowledge and his eternal purposes or decrees.

3. We only once more infer from the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, that he will most certainly so order all things, and bring them to such a result as shall be best calculated to manifest the *glory of his own character*, and to secure and promote the *greatest good of his universal kingdom*. The bible teaches us that "the Lord hath made all thing for himself." The manifestation of his own glorious perfections is his great end in all his works, and in all his dispensations. On this interesting idea the twenty-four elders whom John in vision heard singing in heaven, were expatiating in their rapturous anthem of praise and adoration before the throne of the glorious and eternal I AM: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power; for thou hast created all things: and for thy pleasure they are, and were created." God has proposed his own glory as his highest end in all his works. This end he will most certainly accomplish. The omniscience of God, which implies his foreknowledge, enables him to foresee every thing which would obstruct the accomplishment of his wise and benevolent plans, and also every thing necessary to their accomplishment. On the ground, therefore, of God's foreknowledge, we are warranted confidently to believe that he will so order all things, that the wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder he will restrain. Alleluia, alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Amen.