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• **SERMON X.**

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**THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD, ESPECIALLY IN
ELECTION.***

LUKE 4:28—30. *And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, WERE FILLED WITH WRATH, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way.*

OUR Saviour had explained to the Nazarenes a prophecy of Isaiah, and informed them that it was accomplished in himself. This seemed to afford them much pleasure. But after all, he was aware that they entertained objections to him, on account of the obscurity of his birth. He also knew that they had heard of the miraculous cures he had performed at Capernaum, and expected him to do at least as much for the people of Nazareth, "where he had been brought up." This expectation, he, for wise reasons, did not intend to gratify. He proceeded therefore to show them that he had an undoubted right to perform his miracles when and wherever he pleased, according to the dictates of his own wisdom and goodness: and if he should withhold his favors altogether from them, he would be fully justified by their unbelief. In making such discriminations, he was acting just as the prophets Elijah and Elisha had done. Vs. 25,26,27. The proud self-confident Nazarenes imagined they held an irresistible claim to the miraculous services of the Lord Jesus; and could not brook the idea that they deserved to be passed by in the distribution of the divine favors. To perform cures at Capernaum, and none at Nazareth—this was an unpardonable offence. And when the Lord Jesus ventured to justify himself, by asserting his *sovereign* right, to "do what he would with his own," and to confer unmerited favors as his own infinite wisdom and goodness might direct; they were all on a sudden transported with rage. And forgetting the sacredness of the day, and the purpose for which

*This discourse, (furnished at the request of the Editor,) is an abridgment of a small treatise lately published by the author.

they had assembled, they rushed upon him with one accord, and made a bold and desperate attempt to destroy his life.

The Nazarenes were by no means singular in their resentment. The doctrines preached by our Saviour have always aroused the enmity of the carnal heart. This has been especially the case with those doctrines which exhibit God in the character of a *sovereign*. Of this kind, I shall refer you to two examples, which I design to make the subject of my further remarks.

I. *God's sovereign disposal of ALL events.* •

II. *His SPECIAL purpose of mercy.*

I. There are few things taught in the Bible which have given more offence than the doctrine that God is the disposer of all events. And as it is well known to be a doctrine of our branch of the church, it has, towards her, occasioned no small share of hostility. Men have undertaken to deduce from it a long list of absurdities and blasphemies, which they have exhibited to the world as parts of our theological system: such as that "*God is the author of sin*,"—"that we deny man's *free-agency*, and make him a *mere machine*,"—that "we set aside the *necessity of means*, and maintain a system of *fatali-ty*." To support these charges they produce a detached passage of our Confession of Faith, which says, that "God ordained whatsoever comes to pass." If, however, we turn to our standards and read the whole sentence, all these slanders will be effectually silenced. God "ordained whatsoever comes to pass; yet, so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." Chap. III. § 1. Here are three very important limiting clauses, to which I wish to call your attention.

1. The first of the clauses declares, that God has SO ordained all things, as NOT to be the author of sin. And you may now see upon what grounds men have labored to fix upon us the odium of a tenet, impious and shocking in the extreme, and worse, if possible, than atheism itself.

2. The second limiting clause, denies expressly any such foreordination as would set aside free-agency. "Thereby, neither is violence offered to the will of the creatures." Here again you may see with what justice the clamor is raised against us, "that we deny free-agency and make man a mere machine." You may now be assured that such a charge has nothing in our standards for its support. Turn to Chap. IX. § 1., and you will read thus, "God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil." 'This indeed is a truth of which we are all perfectly conscious. And we are aware that to deny it would be to set aside man's accountability to God.

3. The third limiting clause in the sentence says, that God, "so" ordained all things as not to take away human liberty, nor the necessity of means, but rather to establish them. "Thereby, the liberty or contingency of second causes is not taken away, but rather ESTABLISHED." Here again, you may see the dishonesty, or rather I should say, the ignorance of those who

charge us with denying human liberty, or the efficacy of means, or with maintaining a system of fatality. Charity should perhaps leads us to the conclusion that they have never seen, or never attentively examined the standards of our church. Any other supposition would be attended with such an imputation against their morals, as I am unwilling to bring. Those who hold the doctrine of our church, as you now learn, must believe in human liberty, in the necessity and efficacy of means, and must be, if possible, more free from fatalism than any others. If any have held contrary to this, they did not believe our doctrine; and it is uncandid, it is illiberal, it is unchristian to blame the whole body with the eccentricities of a few individuals.

All truly Calvinistic divines, distinguish foreordination into efficacious and *permissive*. By the former, is denoted, whatever God accomplishes by his *positive agency*; by the latter, whatever for wise reasons, he chooses to permit. This distinction you will find is admitted by our church. Chap. V. § IV, and Chap. VI. § I. In this view of the subject, the doctrine will be fully presented in these two propositions,

1. Nothing comes to pass, without the agency or permission of the Deity.
2. What God now does, he always intended to do, and what he now permits, he always designed to permit.

The first of these positions needs no proof. The second is evidenced by the unchangeableness of God. To make this matter plain, let us suppose that God creates a new world to-day; you will admit that he does it from *design*. And if so he must always have had that design, or else he has formed a new purpose and is changeable; which he denies, saying, "I am the LORD, I change not."

Again; if God creates a world to-day, and does so from *design*, when did he form that design? Not till to-day? Why not sooner? Is he more wise, more mighty, more benevolent to-day, or does he see something new, which induces him to form an intention which never existed in his mind before.

It may also be demonstrated from *his foreknowledge*. For whatever any being foreknows he will do of his own accord, *that* he must already have resolved to do. If, for example, you know that you will, of your own accord, take a journey to-morrow, you must already have resolved upon that journey. Now God foreknew that he would, of his own accord, make a world to-day. He knew it from eternity. How did he know it? If his determination was unsettled at that period; if he had not already come to a decision on the subject, how could he *certainly* know that he would create a world to-day? The same reasoning applied to any thing else that God does in creation or providence, will issue in the same conclusions. Indeed if we deny the principle, that *what God now does he always meant to do*, we disrobe him of his perfections, and reduce him to the level of a creature.

In the same manner it may be shown, that *what God now permits he always meant to permit*. Did God know from eternity that he should permit a wicked man to persecute his church to-day? How did he know it? If his purpose was not settled, how did he know *certainly* that he should permit him.

From what has been said, you may easily understand what is meant by *foreordination*. But I think proper now to present the subject in another point of view. To *foreordain*, in the technical sense in which the word is used by Calvinists, signifies to *determine to render a future event certain, whether by positive agency or permission*. Thus: if you could know that the giving of a tract to a drunkard, would, with infallible certainty, issue in his reformation, and you determine to give the book; in this case you *foreordain* the reformation of the drunkard. You determine to do what renders his reformation *certain*, and you fulfil your decree by *positive agency*. Now suppose you could know with equally infallible certainty, that the reformation of the drunkard will occasion some of his friends to attack him with much profane abuse. I say you know it with *absolute certainty*, and yet rather than lose so great a good as the drunkard's reformation, you adhere to your determination; you give the book and thus render it certain that a man will commit the sin of profanity. Here then you *foreordain*, or are the innocent occasion of the *certainly* of an evil action. But it is plain that you did not "ordain" it in the same sense as you did the other event. You did not, properly speaking, *will* it. In itself considered you hated it. Yet rather than lose the great good you had in view you chose to bear with the evil. We say then, that you foreordained these disagreeable things *permissively*.

Now in one or other of these senses God ordained "whatsoever comes to pass." No event would ever have taken place but for his agency or permission. When he formed this world he had in view his own glory, which is necessarily connected with the highest good of the universe. He did not begin the work, as an ignorant architect commences a building, without a settled plan. No. He beheld with an intuitive glance, all the possible results of an infinity of systems, and out of them all chose ONE. All the long train of consequences which would flow from that system, passed in review before him. He held his eye steadily upon every event,—every action that would sooner or later flow out of this plan of operations. He saw, as one *certain* result, that men would sin, that men would be punished. He knew that he could, by destroying free-agency, or by a variety of other alterations in the system, prevent the entrance of sin. But probably such alterations would have interfered with the main end he had in view and he saw it would be best to permit it. He might have determined to leave sin unpunished, but this would have tarnished the lustre of his glory. Besides, this plan was so admirable, that sin itself would be overruled for the promotion of his glorious designs. Perceiving then, all these results; being able to calculate to a *certainly*, all the holiness and all the sin, all the happiness and all the misery, that would take place through his agency or permission, from the commencement to the end of time, he deliberately chose this system and ushered it into existence. He did not choose it for the sake of the sin and misery, which, through the freedom of man, would certainly attend it; but he chose it for the greater good which would be effected by it, in spite of the existence of sin and misery. I say, being able to calculate to a *certainly* all the events which would result from it, he put the system into operation; and thus, either *efficaciously* or *permissively* determined the *certainly* of whatever comes to pass.

In support of this doctrine we appeal to the *sacred oracles*. Paul, in Eph.

1:11, says, "In whom we have an inheritance, being **PREDESTINATED** according to the **PURPOSE** of him who *worketh all things* after the **COUNSEL** of his own will." Here is "Predestination," a "purpose" of God, and a "counsel," according to which he *worketh all things*. The same apostle, in Rom. 11:36, speaking of God, tells us that "Of Him, and through him, and to him, are **ALL THINGS**." Does this bear no resemblance to the doctrine? Again, in Acts 4:27,28, we read thus, "Of a truth, against the holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together, *for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy COUNSEL determined before to be done*." Here we ask, Were not the sufferings and death of Christ *certain* events? And did not God for wise reasons *intentionally* permit the Gentiles and Jews to do as they did? And were they on that account deprived of free-agency? No. On the contrary they acted the more freely, for God had for a long time held them back from taking the life of Jesus, but when the appointed time came, he was delivered into their hands. I shall add but one more passage, although it would be easy to cite a hundred. The brethren of Joseph acted very wickedly in selling their brother to go into Egypt, and did it of their *own accord*. Yet Joseph says to them, Gen. 50:20, "But as for you ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive." Does not this look as though the selling of Joseph was a *certain event*, and that God permitted it for wise reasons? Indeed how could the Most High certainly know any thing future, unless it were certain? That foreknowledge which God has of the actions of his creatures, must be *certain*; for nothing else deserves the name of knowledge. To foreknow that a thing may be, or may not be, is to know nothing about it. It follows, that all that was foreknown to God from eternity, was *certain* from eternity, and will infallibly take place, through his agency or permission. But this is nothing but the doctrine of foreordination.*

* Pressed with this kind of argument, and supposing the certainty of an action to be inconsistent with its freedom, some have denied that God is able to know all future events. What an idea is this! That God has set in operation a system, without being able to know whether its results will be for his glory! for this he cannot know, unless he knows all the future actions of his creatures. Dark indeed must be the prospects of the Supreme Ruler of the universe; and awful must be his suspense and anxiety, while sitting at the helm of affairs. He can make no provision beforehand to meet an emergency, but must govern the universe by sudden snifts and expedients. This theory is not only contrary to sound reason, but is contradicted by *all the prophecies*, and by the whole tenor of scripture.

To avoid these dreadful consequences, some have invented a theory, if possible still more absurd, viz. that although God could if he pleased, foreknow all the voluntary actions of his creatures, yet that he *chooses not to know them*, lest by rendering them certain he should infringe the liberty of the will. This scheme is pressed with all the difficulties of the former one, and in addition has some that are peculiar to itself. It represents the all-wise God, as putting a system into operation, shutting his eyes, and refusing to look at all its consequences, and of *choice*, remaining ignorant whether it will eventuate in his glory; plunging forward in the dark! According to the first of these theories, God is necessarily imperfect; according to the last he is voluntarily so. This hypothesis was advocated by the Chevalier Ramsay, and from him, it was adopted by the learned and eccentric Dr. Adam Clarke. There is little danger of its being advocated by any reflecting theologian. But it serves to show how heavily the doctrine of the Divine foreknowledge presses upon Arminianism.

Obj. 1st. If foreordination be true, what encouragement have we to pray? I answer; a thousand times more than if the events of life depended on creatures or chance. It was a part of his eternal plan to answer the prayer of faith. He has so arranged *all* events as that every effectual fervent prayer of the righteous shall be fulfilled, and that without resorting to a miracle, or interfering with any other of his purposes.

Now take away this doctrine, and see what encouragement you will have to pray. You ask God to save the life of a sick friend; but God must not interfere, for he has left it to creatures or to chance whether he lives or dies. You pray for the conversion of a sinner; but you pray in vain, for God has left it to chance or to his own natural inclination to decide the question. Thus you see that the denial of the doctrine, and not the maintaining of it, discourages prayer.

Obj. 2d. If the certainty of men's actions is determined, how can they act otherwise than they do? *Ans.* They can *if they will*. They have the *power*. A man is able to commit a wicked action which it is *certain* he will not commit. And he has power to refrain from an act, which it is still absolutely certain he will perform. "But if I had done otherwise than I did to-day, would not God have been disappointed?" No: If you had done otherwise, the *certainty* would have been otherwise.

Obj. 3d. Why was not language so unpopular and so liable to abuse, as that on the subject of the *decrees*, left out of our standards? *Ans.* Why is such language found in the scriptures? Why did Paul say, "predestinated according to the purpose of him who *worketh all things* according to the counsel of his own will"? Why did he not leave out the whole of his first chapter to the Ephesians, and the 8th and 9th to the Romans? No doubt there are many who would gladly have omitted them, and who would now expunge them from the Bible if it were in their power. The scriptures contain abundance of language as *unpopular*, and as liable to abuse as any used in our Confession. Indeed I have often thought that there are many passages, which, if adopted verbatim in our standards, would have excited even more "wrath" than is at present indulged against us.

II. *God's SPECIAL purpose of mercy.*

Perhaps there is no doctrine which has occasioned so much "wrath" against our church, as the doctrine of God's special *purpose of mercy*, or, to use a scriptural term, that of "*election*." And inasmuch as this is a truth very clearly and distinctly taught in the word of God, great labor and ingenuity have been thought necessary in order to overthrow it. One very common expedient, employed for this purpose, has been to hold up false and distorted views of it, by which it may be brought into discredit. It will, therefore, be highly necessary in entering upon the subject, to guard it against the misrepresentations of its enemies, and to define it as clearly and accurately as possible. I remark then,

1. That it is no part of the doctrine of election, *that God made a part of mankind merely to damn them*. This is an aspersion cast upon it by its

enemies. But it is not true. Election, properly speaking, has nothing to do with the damnation of a single sinner. It is a mere purpose of love and mercy, proceeding from that God who affirms with an oath, that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. If he destroys sinners, it is because their perdition is inseparably connected with his own glory and the highest good of the universe. At the same time, *in itself considered*, he desires the happiness of all his creatures.

2. It is no part of election, *that the elect will be saved, let them do what they may*. It is certain that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The elect cannot be saved unless they come to Christ, and experience the renewing influences of his Spirit. They can no more enter heaven without a preparation for it, than the non-elect. If a man is never concerned about the salvation of his soul, if he does not repent and flee to the Saviour, there is nothing in election that will save him. "Chosen," says the apostle, "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

3. It is no part of election, *that the non-elect will not be saved let them do what they may*. If they would repent and believe the gospel, there is nothing in election that would destroy them. If they would come to Christ he would "in nowise cast them out." What hinders them? No decree of God; nothing but their own aversion to holiness and their love of sin. Election does not stand in their way. Election merely says that some shall be made willing; but if any are willing to come without it, God has solemnly promised to save them. The non-elect will not be lost unless they voluntarily persist in impenitence to the last.

What then is the doctrine of Election? I shall endeavor to exhibit our views of it by an easy illustration.

Suppose the monarch of some mighty empire hears that a small province of his dominions has rebelled against him. Having no pleasure in their death, he sends them an offer of pardon on consistent terms. They all to a man refuse to accept of it. Still inclining to mercy, he sends out ambassadors, commissioned to use every entreaty with the rebels. These go forth and use every effort in vain. The rebels exclaim, "our cause is just and we will die rather than submit." The compassionate monarch, hearing of this, cries out, "how shall I give up all these my subjects to suffer death! I will go myself, and by my personal influence will prevail on the greater part to accept of my proposal of pardon; and inasmuch as such signal obstinacy ought not to go unpunished, I will execute the sentence of the law upon the rest of them, that they may serve as ensamples to all my subjects." This determination he carries into effect. The greater part are reconciled, and the remainder punished.*

* It is generally admitted that God from eternity determined to punish all the finally impenitent, *knowing*, at the same time, who the finally impenitent would be. The Calvinist only adds to this, that God is able to overcome their wilful obstinacy, and bring them to an acquiescence in the terms of salvation, but, for wise reasons, *permits* them to continue in sin, and become to the universe appalling monuments of his justice. And herein consists the sovereignty of his dispensations towards them. Thus their destruction is of themselves; and their refusal of mercy was, in the order in which it stood in his mind, *prior* to his determination to punish. Our Confession of Faith assigns, as the only reason why the non-elect cannot be saved, that "they do not truly come to Christ." Chap. X. §IV.

But let us now make a slight alteration in the case, and suppose that this monarch, being a prophet, clearly foresees the rebellion before it will take place. He reasons with himself, and makes up his determinations. Does the circumstance that all his determinations were formed previously to the rebellion, alter their moral character? Does it detract at all from the glory of his wisdom, justice, and mercy? Can you condemn him for pursuing the very course he ought to have taken if his purposes had never been formed until the time? Can you censure him for resolving to make a desperate effort to save some of his rebellious subjects? This were to blame him for being merciful. Will you condemn him because he determined to be beforehand to make a public example of some of the rejecters of his mercy? Can you say that he fixed their condition by his decree, and thus rendered it impossible to accept his pardon? No. They fixed their condition themselves. They were "ordained to wrath and dishonor *for their sins.*" The monarch's determination to punish was, in the order in which it stood in his mind, subsequent to their refusal of a pardon.

Finally; will you censure him for not constraining all to submit to his proposals? This is to allow him no room for the exercise of discretion. The good of his empire might, for aught you know, require that he should make examples of some of the obstinate rebels.

Now although no illustration will exactly meet the case; yet, I think, I have, in every material point, exhibited the Calvinistic view of election.

1. God is the sovereign Lord of the universe. This little spot of his dominions has rebelled against him. All mankind are in a state of sin and condemnation; all are exposed to his wrath and curse.

2. God, in infinite mercy, has offered a pardon to rebels of Adam's race, through the Redeemer. His language is, "Whosoever will, let him come;" and "him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." But notwithstanding the free offer, mankind continue in their rebellion, and "will not come" to Christ that they might have life. Like the persons mentioned by our Lord in the parable of the supper; "they all *with one consent* began to make excuse." Left to himself, every individual will reject the offer of a Saviour, and sink to endless ruin. If God does not interpose, in the omnipotency of his grace, to subdue the obstinacy of the sinner's heart, all will perish in the refusal of his mercy, and Christ will have bled and died in vain.

3. God has determined that so distressing a result shall not take place. He was not willing to see the whole human family perish, as they inevitably would, if left to themselves. He did not intend that his Son should bleed and die in vain. He has not committed the question of man's salvation to the decision of chance or human depravity. He has determined to save *some*. By the special influence of his Spirit, he renews their hearts, and sweetly constrains them to yield. Thus he "*calls* them according to his purpose," *justifies*, and *glorifies* them. What proportion of the human family are included in this his purpose of mercy, we are not informed. But in view of the future days of unclouded prosperity promised to the church, it may be inferred, that by far the greater part of the descendants of Adam, will at last be found among the *elect* of God. And although the number of them is indefinite in the view of man, yet, with God it is so *certain* and *definite*

that he cannot be disappointed. Having thus explained what is meant by Election, I proceed now to *establish* the doctrine,

1. By the FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

It is admitted that God changes the hearts of some sinners and saves them through Christ; and that he does so of his own accord. Now, did he *fore-know* that he would do this? Did he know it *from eternity*? How did he know it, if it was *uncertain*? If his purpose was not already fixed; if his resolution was at all wavering; how could he know with *certainty* that he would change the hearts of some sinners and save them? Let any candid man look at this, and he must believe the doctrine of election. It may be further evinced,

2. By the HOLY SCRIPTURES.

You admit the Bible to be the word of God. If so, its statements are all entitled to implicit confidence. Here there can be no error or mistake. Let us then go to the Bible; and let us go, not to alter, to pervert, or to wrest it from its natural meaning; but with a sincere desire to know what the Lord hath spoken, and determined to acquiesce in all his decisions, however repugnant to our pride or our prejudices.

Turn to the 1st chapter to the Ephesians, and in the 3d and 4th verses you will read thus: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as *he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love.*" That his meaning might be still more evident, the apostle adds immediately, verse 4. "Having PREDESTINATED us unto the *adoption of his will.*" What is this but the doctrine of election? Look now at the 11th verse of the same chapter. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being PREDESTINATED according to the PURPOSE of him who worketh all things after the COUNSEL of his own will." Does not this look like election?

Turn now to the eighth chapter to the Romans. At verse 28, the apostle asserts that "all things shall work together for good to them that love God." And how does he prove it? By a reference to the eternal purpose of God in election. "And we know," says he, "that all things shall work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the *called according to his purpose.* 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.*" Now if the doctrine of election be not true, what force is there in his argument?

In 2 Thess. 2:13, we have this declaration: "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath *from the beginning CHOSEN you to salvation* through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." And in 2 Tim. 1:9. we read, "God hath saved us and called us with an *holy calling, not according to our works*, but according to his *own purpose and grace*, which was given us in Christ Jesus *before the world began.*" Surely, language has no meaning, unless these

passages assert the doctrine of personal election to holiness and salvation.

When Paul preached the gospel at Antioch in Pisidia, we are informed, that "as many as were ORDAINED to ETERNAL LIFE believed." Acts 13:48. And at the commencement of a Christian church at Corinth, God looked on the heathen inhabitants and said to Paul, "*I have much people* in this city."

Let us now hear what Jesus, our divine teacher, has said on this subject. He "was foreordained before the foundation of the world" to be a Mediator; and entered into an engagement to give his life as a ransom for sinners. But would he undertake the painful task on an *uncertainty*? Would he consent to endure the sorrows of Gethsemane, and the anguish of Calvary, leaving it to *chance*, or to the depraved heart of man to decide, whether any should ever be redeemed by his blood? No: he well knew, that in such an event not one soul would ever be saved: and that he would reap no reward of his death. Hence it was *rendered certain* that some should come to him, and experience the saving benefits of his sufferings. We read of a *promise of eternal life before the world began*. Tit. 1:1,2: "Paul—an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's *elect*—in hope of *eternal life*, which God, that cannot lie, *promised before the world began*." To whom was it promised? Not to creatures, for they were not yet in existence; but to the Lord Jesus. The ancient prophets frequently refer to this promise made to the Messiah, and say, "a seed shall serve him." "He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." "*Thy people shall be WILLING IN THE DAY OF THY POWER*." The Lord Jesus frequently spake of those who were promised him, with inexpressible affection, as his "SHEEP," and as those that were GIVEN him, by the Father. "I lay down my life for the *sheep*." Elect Gentiles were counted as *sheep* before their conversion. "And *other sheep* I have which are not of this fold; them also *I must bring*, and they shall hear my voice." John 10:16. Again, he says to the Jews, verse 26, "Ye believe not *because ye are not of my sheep*." And alluding to the promise of the everlasting covenant, "all that the Father *giveth me SHALL COME* to me." John 6:37. "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he *should give eternal life*, TO AS MANY AS THOU HAST GIVEN HIM." John 17:2. To the mother of Zebedee's children, he says, "To sit on my right hand and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them *for whom it is prepared* of my Father." Matth. 20:23. And again; in his prayer in the garden, "I pray for them, I pray not for the world, but *for them whom THOU HAST GIVEN ME*." John 17:9. Once more, he says, "No man can come to me except it were GIVEN UNTO HIM of my Father." Chap. 6:65. Many of our Lord's hearers were highly offended at this last declaration, and "went back and walked with him no more." Let me ask you, my hearers, in the words of your Saviour, "Will ye also go away?" Are any of you "ashamed of Christ or of HIS WORDS"? Remember they are the words by which you will be condemned or acquitted at the last day. You may wrest, pervert, or oppose them, but you cannot alter their meaning, or cause one jot or tittle of them to pass away. You may now refuse to believe them, but the time is coming when conviction will be pressed upon you with an eloquence, infinitely surpassing that of human or angelic tongues. The day is approaching that shall behold the Son of man bursting forth in dreadful glory from amid the clouds of heaven. He shall "send forth his angels and gather his ELECT from the four

winds." Then will he preach the doctrine of election to an assembled universe, loud as the thunders of the archangel's trump. To those on his right hand, he will say, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD."

I am aware that all the passages we can bring in support of election, may be ingeniously *explained away*, so as to "please men;" and so can any truth contained in the Bible. The Universalist professes to be able, in this way, to erase the idea of future punishment from its pages. The Unitarian, also, will tell you that he can explain away the doctrine of Christ's divinity. For my own part I cannot conscientiously pursue such a course, I would sooner deny the scriptures altogether, than attempt an evasion of their proper meaning. Various expedients have been employed to evade the passages which treat of election; and some have entertained unfriendly feelings towards us, because we could not adopt their expositions. Let us then examine some of them, and see whether we are so highly censurable in rejecting them.

1. Some tell us that **ALL MANKIND** were "chosen in Christ." But let us try this mode of exposition upon a few passages. Eph. 1:4,5. "He hath chosen [*all mankind*] in him before the foundation of the world—Having predestinated [*all mankind*] unto the adoption of children." Again, Rom. 8:30. "He did predestinate [*all mankind*]—called—justified—and glorified" them. This is universal salvation without much disguise.

2. Others explain the passages quoted, of an election of *nations*, and not of *persons*. But has God ever "chosen to salvation" nations, as such? Has he "predestinated" whole nations "unto the adoption of children," and *given* them to Christ? Well, if so, they will all come to him. Having been "predestinated," they will be "*called—justified—and glorified*;" and as nations consist of particular persons, it is after all, a *personal* election.

3. Another expedient, to get rid of the doctrine, is, to explain those scriptures as meaning, that God predestinated some unto salvation, *because he knew that they would believe and be saved, at all events*. I cannot adopt this scheme for several reasons. The **FIRST** is, that it is *not countenanced by the scriptures*. It is true, Peter says, "Elect *according* to the foreknowledge of God." And we admit that God's election of men is *according* to his foresight of the fall and ruined condition of our race; and to his knowledge of the certainty, that without the interposition of his special grace, all would refuse his mercy and perish. But the inspired writer does not intimate that he chose any *because* he knew they would have faith. Paul also says, "Whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate." But the verb **KNOW** is often used to signify *love*. Thus, "I *know* my sheep and am *known* of mine." "Depart from me, I never *knew* you." So in this case, "Whom he did *fore-know*," or love from eternity, "them he did predestinate," "called," &c. agreeably to his declaration in Jeremiah, "I have loved thee with an *everlasting love*, **THEREFORE** with loving kindness *have I drawn thee*." 31:3.

My **SECOND** difficulty, in adopting the above scheme, is, that it *disagrees with the scripture*. The apostle says, "God hath chosen you—through

sanctification of the Spirit and *belief* of the truth." So far are faith and holiness in man, from being the moving causes of his election, that they are only the *means* through which God fulfils his designs of mercy. So, again, "as many as were *ordained* to eternal life *believed*." Here it is evidently the design of the sacred writer, to represent the faith of believers as proceeding *from* the purpose of God to save, not that purpose as proceeding from their faith. Besides, the expression, "according to the good pleasure of his will;" and "according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," plainly imply *sovereignty* in the predestinating act.

THIRDLY. I shall mention one more difficulty in the way of adopting the expedient referred to. Faith is either the work of man in his own heart; or it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Either man or God, is the *prime, moving cause* of its existence. If man be that cause; if we suppose that faith owes its existence in his heart to any work of his; then, to say that God chose some to salvation, because he foresaw their faith, is to say that he chose them "according to their *works*," which the apostle denies. Besides: it represents God as moved in his designs of mercy, by something good foreseen in the creature: for faith is something good. St. Jude calls it "holy faith." It would follow of course that when the apostle gave *thanks* to God for his own election and that of others, he is to be understood as merely expressing gratitude, that the LORD had foreseen their faith; and his language is to be paraphrased as follows,

"God, I thank thee that, as thou knewest well, I would not be as other men are; thou knewest that I would have faith whilst others would remain in unbelief. Thou knewest there would be something in me, that would lead me to Christ and salvation. And foreseeing this good disposition of mine, thou didst choose **ME** to salvation in preference to other Jews. And for this reason, thou didst meet me, when on my way to Damascus I was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against thy disciples." Was this the meaning of the apostle, when he gave thanks to God for his election? No. "Not according to our works" says he, "but according to *his own purpose*, and grace."

But faith is not of man. It is *wrought in the heart* by the blessed Spirit. God is its prime moving cause. The scripture assures us that it is "not of ourselves," but "the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8,9. Jesus is said to be "the *author* and finisher of faith." Heb. 12:2. And it is placed among the "fruits of the Spirit." Gal. 5:22. If, then, God from eternity knew, that some would have faith, he knew that it would be a gift bestowed by himself; inasmuch as left to themselves, not one would ever come to Christ. And how did he certainly know that he would bestow that gift, unless he had already *resolved* to bestow it? And why had he resolved to bestow it, unless he had already formed a *determination to save*; which is the same thing, as election?

Have we not reason to suspect the soundness of any system, which cannot be supported without elaborate criticisms, numerous evasions of scripture texts, and frequent alterations in the translation? And may not our suspicion be confirmed, when we see the advocates of that system plainly manifesting a dislike to some parts of the Bible, never referring to them, except it be to do away their obvious meaning, and appearing always displeased, when

they are read or quoted, even without comment, by others? Do not these things betray a lurking consciousness of holding some opinions, not easily reconciled with the word of God?

I proceed now, to reply to a few objections, which may be urged against the doctrine of election.

Obj. 1st. "If I am not one of the elect, what good will it do if I go to Christ?"

Ans. Just as much good as if you knew you were elected. Election cannot injure you. It only touches the question whether any shall be constrained to come. But if you are willing to come, God has solemnly promised to save you at all events.

Obj. 2d. If election be true, how can God be *sincere* in his invitations to all, to believe and be saved?

Ans. He is sincere, because if all men would repent and believe the gospel, they would infallibly be saved; and because he requires of them, in order to their salvation, only what it is their duty to do, and what they are blameable for not doing; and further, because he is most willing that his invitation should be accepted. Again: it is only on account of the universal rejection of his offers, that he makes any selection at all from among mankind. In eternity, when he formed his purpose of special mercy, he viewed mankind as having already refused his overtures. Their refusal, as to the order in which it stood, in the divine mind, was *prior* to that purpose. Election represents God as saying, "I will make an unlimited offer of pardon to mankind, and as they will all refuse it, I shall interpose by my special grace, and constrain some to submission." Hence it is plain that his offers are just as sincere, as they would have been, if he had not formed a purpose to save a single one of mankind.

Obj. 3d. This doctrine represents God as *partial*, and as a "respector of persons."

Ans. I grant that God is *discriminating* in his goodness. This is visible wherever you turn your eyes. He gave nobler powers to men than to worms, to angels than to men. He passed by the rebel angels, and provided a way of mercy for Adam's race. He has passed by the heathen, and sent his gospel to us. He brings one person into being, to become the child of many prayers and instructions, while another is left to the corrupting influence of evil example. But is God therefore *partial*, or a "respector of persons"? "No;" you reply, "because he has *wise reasons* for making these differences." Very well: this is the very answer we intended giving to your objection. Partiality is an *unreasonable*, *capricious*, or *unjust* preference of one person above another. But God is not actuated by caprice in choosing some to eternal life, for he has *wise reasons* not always known to us, for what he does. He is not *unjust*, for he gives to no one less than he deserves. He does not respect the persons of the great, the learned, or the noble of this world, for he calls "not many" of them. He does not accept the person of the rich, on account of his wealth, but has "chosen the poor." He still treats them uniformly according to their moral characters, so that "in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him."

Obj. 4. If election be true why need I use any exertions to obtain salvation?

Ans. God's decree, instead of taking away the necessity of means, rather *establishes* it. He determined to save Noah by means of the ark, but that did not render the ark unnecessary. He determined to save Paul and his fellow passengers from shipwreck, by the exertions of the sailors; but did this render their exertions superfluous? God had promised to give him all that sailed with him. Yet, as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, "Paul said to the Centurion, *Except these abide in the ship, YE CANNOT BE SAVED.*" Because God had determined to deliver these States from European oppression, by the instrumentality of Washington and his compatriots, does it follow that there was no need of their services? And if God has determined to bless you with a bounteous harvest, does that prove that you may safely neglect to sow the seed? So, if you leave your salvation to God's decrees, without any anxiety or exertion on your part, you will sink to hell in spite of election. "Chosen," says the Apostle "THROUGH sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

Obj. 5. The doctrine of election is discouraging.

Ans. Who is disheartened by it? *Ministers of the gospel?* No: it affords them the greatest encouragement they can enjoy. Was it, think you, disheartening to Paul, when visiting the corrupt city of Corinth, to be told by the Lord, "I have much people in this city"? O, take not from us this most precious truth of the Bible! Under the burdens and trials of the ministry, we must sink without it. But is this doctrine discouraging to *praying Christians?* O, no. They never beg of God to convert a careless sinner without a tacit confession of its truth and preciousness, made in pleading with the Lord, that he would himself determine the question of the man's salvation, by the interposition of his own *special constraining* influence. Were it believed by them, that the destiny of immortal souls had been committed to chance, or to the wayward inclinations of the natural heart, the lips of prayer would be sealed in everlasting silence. To whom, then, is the doctrine discouraging? To the *anxious sinner?* No. He casts himself upon this glorious truth as his last hope. When driven from all his "refuges of lies," he is brought to feel, that "if discriminating mercy does not pluck him from the pit, he forever sinks. He feels that he must take his life in his hand, and cast himself at the footstool of sovereignty, pouring out this sum of all his hopes 'Lord if thou wilt thou canst make me clean.'" No, my brethren; this doctrine takes away none but false self-righteous hopes.

Says one, "I should like this doctrine if I were a christian, but it makes me uneasy while I continue in sin." But do you therefore wish it were false? Because you will not accept of mercy, do you wish all others to refuse it? Because you choose to continue in sin and perish, can you not be contented to perish alone? Must you have the whole world sink to despair with you? Because you will force your way to perdition, do you wish to drag down the redeemed from heaven to mingle their wailings with yours? O! who are they that indulge this spirit? Are they men? or are they devils?

Obj. 6. The doctrines of predestination and election are mysterious.

Ans. It is true, that when traced out in all their bearings, they are, in

some degree, mysterious. But is that a good reason for rejecting them? Can you fully comprehend the sublime doctrine of the Trinity? Can you give a satisfactory answer to the question, how sin found an entrance into heaven? Can you explain to me the nature of the union between mind and matter? Can you tell me how the grain you cast into the earth, "springeth up and groweth?" To say you will not believe what you do not fully comprehend, is to deny the greatest part of human knowledge, is to cast contempt upon the revelation of heaven itself.

Does any one say, "My system has no mysteries in it. I can easily reconcile all difficulties that occur." Then, my friend, your system is most certainly false. For Peter tells us that there are some things in Paul's epistles "*hard to be understood*, which they that are UNLEARNED and UNSTABLE, *wrest*". . . . What those things are, it is easy to imagine. And if they were "hard" to an inspired apostle, how is it that they are all so easy to you? No, my friend, if your system has no mysteries in it, it is not the system of the Bible; for "great is the *mystery* of godliness."

Obj. 7. It is objected that these doctrines *do harm*.

Ans. Are they doctrines of the Bible? and is it not true that "ALL scripture is given by inspiration of God—and is *profitable*"? But how is it they do harm? By rendering Christians *negligent*? The apostle Paul was a most zealous advocate of the doctrines, and did he neglect the service of his Divine Master? Did he labor less than the other apostles? Are Calvinists, at the present day, less engaged than others in Bible, Tract, Temperance, and Missionary Societies, in Sunday Schools, and other efforts for the conversion of the world? Will it be said that the doctrines exert an injurious influence upon society? Let us appeal to fact. Which are the most moralized portions of Continental Europe; and what is their prevailing creed? What part of Great Britain is most distinguished for purity of morals; and what theological system predominates? Nay, apply these questions to our own country, and the objection will vanish.

I grant there is one way in which they may do harm. When men labor to impress the public mind with the idea, that Calvinists believe that God is the author of sin; that they deny free-agency, and consider the use of means unnecessary; I say, when efforts are used to impress such ideas upon people, some will take occasion to say, "If all these large and respectable bodies hold such sentiments, there is a strong probability of their truth, and we may be safe in acting accordingly." In this way harm may be, and is often done, not by the truth, but by its enemies. The doctrines have many important uses. They display, in a clear light, the total depravity and enmity of the human heart, in that, without the special agency of the Holy Spirit, all would have rejected the overtures of reconciliation. They shew the sinner his inexcusableness, whilst continuing in sin. They discover to the Christian what he would have been but for constraining grace; and teach him to give the glory to God alone, who "has made him to differ" from others. They make it apparent, that God is *not such an one as ourselves*, and thus correct those false notions of his character, which we are apt to entertain. They display the mercy of God in its most transcendently glorious point of view, as making a last desperate effort in behalf of a sinking world. They are set in the scriptures as "a sign to be spoken against—that the thoughts of many hearts

might be revealed." They discover who is willing that the Lord should reign; who has confidence enough in his wisdom, purity, and goodness, to trust all events in his hands; and are adapted to lay open to view the hypocrisy of those who cry *hosannah*, but are hostile to the government of Jehovah. * * * * *

From what has been said we may learn the secret source of that "wrath" which is aroused against these doctrines, especially election, wherever they are maintained. I have no doubt, indeed, that some oppose them merely because they do not understand them. I am led to this belief by the fact, that some who deny them *in words*, do, notwithstanding, embrace them *substantially* as matters of experience. They will tell you they never would have chosen God, if he had not first chosen them. They will acknowledge that if he had left them to the natural inclinations of their own hearts, they never would have accepted the Saviour. Now this is the very essence of election. But there are others who hate and oppose it, because they see it in a light which disturbs their sins, and tears away their self-righteous hopes. The idea that they are so depraved as to need the *constraining* influence of Almighty grace, in order to their salvation, gives a deadly wound to their pride; and leaves them no peace till they are reconciled to God. Hence, on one occasion, when our Saviour preached it, many of his hearers "went back and walked with him no more." At another time, as we are informed in our text, when he preached it to the Nazarenes, the people were so enraged, that they made a daring attempt upon his life. But against what is all this enmity directed? It is against that glorious purpose of mercy, without which not one sinner would ever have been converted to God; not one of our ruined race would ever have been admitted to glory. * * *