The Sovereignty of God

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THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

By: A.W. PINK

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FOREWORD

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FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

In the following pages an attempt has been made to examine anew in the

light of God's Word some of the profoundest questions which can engage

the human mind. Others have grappled with these mighty problems in days

gone by and from their labours we are the gainers. While making no

claim for originality the writer, nevertheless, has endeavoured to

examine and deal with his subject from an entirely independent

viewpoint. We have studied diligently the writings of such men as

Augustine and Acquinas, Calvin and Melanethon, Jonathan Edwards and

Ralph Erskine, Andrew Fuller and Robert Haldane [1] . And sad it is to

think that these eminent and honoured names are almost entirely unknown

to the present generation. Though, of course, we do not endorse all

their conclusions, yet we gladly acknowledge our deep indebtedness to

their works. We have purposely refrained from quoting freely from these

deeply taught theologians, because we desired that the faith of our

readers should stand not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

For this reason we have quoted freely from the Scriptures and have

sought to furnish proof-texts for every statement we have advanced.

It would be foolish for us to expect that this work will meet with

general approval. The trend of modern theology-if theology it can be

called-is ever toward the deification of the creature rather than the

glorification of the Creator, and the leaven of present-day Rationalism

is rapidly permeating the whole of Christendom. The malevolent effects

of Darwinianism are more far reaching than most are aware. Many of

those among our religious leaders who are still regarded as orthodox

would, we fear, be found to be very heterodox if they were weighed in

the balances of the Sanctuary. Even those who are clear intellectually,

upon other truths, are rarely sound in doctrine. Few, very few, today,

really believe in the complete ruin and total depravity of man. Those

who speak of man's "free will," and insist upon his inherent power to

either accept or reject the Saviour, do but voice their ignorance of

the real condition of Adam's fallen children. And if there are few who

believe that, so far as he is concerned, the condition of the sinner is

entirely hopeless, there are fewer still who really believe in the

absolute Sovereignty of God.

In addition to the widespread effects of unscriptural teaching, we also

have to reckon with the deplorable superficiality of the present

generation. To announce that a certain book is a treatise on doctrine

is quite sufficient to prejudice against it the great bulk of

church-members and most of our preachers as well. The craving today is

for something light and spicy, and few have patience, still less

desire, to examine carefully that which would make a demand both upon

their hearts and their mental powers. We remember, also, how that it is

becoming increasingly difficult in these strenuous days for those who

are desirous of studying the deeper things of God to find the time

which such study requires. Yet, it is still true that "Where there's a

will, there's a way," and in spite of the discouraging features

referred to, we believe there is even now a godly remnant who will take

pleasure in giving this little work a careful consideration, and such

will, we trust, find in it "Meat in due season."

We do not forget the words of one long since passed away, namely, that

"Denunciation is the last resort of a defeated opponent." To dismiss

this book with the contemptuous epithet--"Hyper-Calvinism!" will not be

worthy of notice. For controversy we have no taste, and we shall not

accept any challenge to enter the lists against those who might desire

to debate the truths discussed in these pages. So far as our personal

reputation is concerned, that we leave our Lord to take care of, and

unto Him we would now commit this volume and whatever fruit it may

bear, praying Him to use it for the enlightening of His own dear people

(insofar as it is in accord with His Holy Word) and to pardon the

writer for and preserve the reader from the injurious effects of any

false teaching that may have crept into it. If the joy and comfort

which have come to the author while penning these pages are shared by

those who may scan them, then we shall be devoutly thankful to the One

whose grace alone enables us to discern spiritual things.

June 1918 Arthur W. Pink.

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[1] Among those who have dealt most helpfully with the subject of God's

Sovereignty in recent years we mention Drs. Rice, J. B. Moody, and

George S. Bishop, from whose writings we have also received

instruction.

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FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is now two years since the first edition of this work was presented

to the Christian public. Its reception has been far more favourable

than the author had expected. Many have notified him of the help and

blessing received from a perusal of his attempts to expound what is

admittedly a difficult subject. For every word of appreciation we

return hearty thanks to Him in Whose light we alone "see light." A few

have condemned the book in unqualified terms, and these we commend to

God and to the Word of His grace, remembering that it is written, "a

man can receive nothing, except it be given him from Heaven" (John

3:27). Others have sent us friendly criticisms and these have been

weighed carefully, and we trust that, in consequence, this revised

edition will be unto those who are members of the household of faith

more profitable than the former one.

One word of explanation seems to be called for. A number of respected

brethren in Christ felt that our treatment of the Sovereignty of God

was too extreme and one-sided. It has been pointed out that a

fundamental requirement in expounding the Word of God is the need of

preserving the balance of Truth. With this we are in hearty accord. Two

things are beyond dispute: God is Sovereign, and man is a responsible

creature. But in this book we are treating of the Sovereignty of God,

and while the responsibility of man is readily owned, yet, we do not

pause on every page to insist on it; instead, we have sought to stress

that side of the Truth which in these days is almost universally

neglected. Probably 95 per cent of the religious literature of the day

is devoted to a setting forth of the duties and obligations of men. The

fact is that those who undertake to expound the Responsibility of man

are the very ones who have lost 'the balance of Truth' by ignoring,

very largely, the Sovereignty of God. It is perfectly right to insist

on the responsibility of man, but what of God?-has He no claims, no

rights! A hundred such works as this are needed, ten thousand sermons

would have to be preached throughout the land on this subject, if the

'balance of Truth' is to be regained. The 'balance of Truth' has been

lost, lost through a disproportionate emphasis being thrown on the

human side, to the minimising, if not the exclusion, of the Divine

side. We grant that this book is one-sided, for it only pretends to

deal with one side of the Truth and that is, the neglected side, the

Divine side. Furthermore, the question might be raised: Which is the

more to be deplored-an over emphasising of the human side and an

insufficient emphasis on the Divine side, or, an over emphasising of

the Divine side and an insufficient emphasis on the human side? Surely,

if we err at all it is on the right side. Surely, there is far more

danger of making too much of man and too little of God, than there is

of making too much of God and too little of man. Yea, the question

might well be asked, Can we press God's claims too far? Can we be too

extreme in insisting upon the absoluteness and universality of the

Sovereignty of God?

It is with profound thankfulness to God that, after a further two years

diligent study of Holy Writ, with the earnest desire to discover what

almighty God has been pleased to reveal to His children on this

subject, we are able to testify that we see no reason for making any

retractions from what we wrote before, and while we have re-arranged

the material of this work, the substance and doctrine of it remains

unchanged. May the One Who condescended to bless the first edition of

this work be pleased to own even more widely this revision.

ARTHUR W. PINK, 1921 SWENGEL, PA.

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FOREWORD TO THE THIRD EDITION

That a third edition of this work is now called for, is a cause of

fervent praise to God. As the darkness deepens and the pretensions of

men are taking on an ever-increasing blatancy, the need becomes greater

for the claims of God to be emphasised. As the twentieth century Babel

of religious tongues is bewildering so many, the duty of God's servants

to point to the one sure anchorage for the heart, is the more apparent.

Nothing is so tranquillising and so stabilising as the assurance that

the Lord Himself is on the Throne of the universe, "working all things

after the counsel of His own will."

The Holy Spirit has told us that there are in the Scriptures some

things hard to be understood," but mark it is "hard" not "impossible!"

A patient waiting on the Lord, a diligent comparison of Scripture with

Scripture, often issues in a fuller apprehension of that which before

was obscure to us. During the last ten years it has pleased God to

grant us further light on certain parts of His Word, and this we have

sought to use in improving our expositions of different passages. But

it is with unfeigned thanksgiving that we find it unnecessary to either

change or modify any doctrine contained in the former editions. Yea, as

time goes by, we realise (by Divine grace) with ever-increasing force,

the truth, the importance, and the value of the Sovereignty of God as

it pertains to every branch of our lives.

Our hearts have been made to rejoice again and again by unsolicited

letters which have come to hand from every quarter of the earth,

telling of help and blessing received from the former editions of this

work. One Christian friend was so stirred by reading it and so

impressed by its testimony, that a check was sent to be used in sending

free copies to missionaries in fifty foreign countries, "that its

glorious message may encircle the globe"; numbers of whom have written

us to say how much they have been strengthened in their fight with the

powers of darkness. To God alone belongs all the glory. May He deign to

use this third edition to the honour of His own great Name, and to the

feeding of His scattered and starved sheep.

Morton's Gap, A. W. P. Kentucky 1929

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FOREWORD TO THE FOURTH EDITION

It is with profound praise to "God most high" that another edition of

this valuable and helpful book is now called for. Though its teaching

runs directly counter to that which is being promulgated on every hand

today, yet we are happy to be able to say that its circulation is

increasing to the strengthening of the faith, comfort and hope of an

increasing number of God's elect. We commit this new edition to Him

whom we "delight to honour," praying that He may be pleased to bless

its circulation to the enlightening of many more of His own, to the

"praise of the glory of His grace," and a clearer apprehension of the

majesty of God and His Sovereign mercy.

I. C. HERENDEEN. 1949.

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INTRODUCTION

Who is regulating affairs on this earth today-God, or the Devil? That

God reigns supreme in Heaven is generally conceded; that He does so

over this world, is almost universally denied-if not directly, then

indirectly. More and more are men in their philosophising and

theorising relegating God to the background. Take the material realm.

Not only is it denied that God created everything by personal and

direct action, but few believe that He has any immediate concern in

regulating the works of His own hands. Everything is supposed to be

ordered according to the (impersonal and abstract) "laws of Nature."

Thus is the Creator banished from His own creation. Therefore we need

not be surprised that men, in their degrading conceptions, exclude Him

from the realm of human affairs. Throughout Christendom, with an almost

negligible exception, the theory is held that man is "a free agent,"

and therefore, lord of his fortunes and the determiner of his destiny.

That Satan is to be blamed for much of the evil which is in the world

is freely affirmed by those who, though having so much to say about

"the responsibility of man," often deny their own responsibility, by

attributing to the Devil what, in fact, proceeds from their own evil

hearts (Mark 7:21-23).

But who is regulating affairs on this earth today-God, or the Devil?

Attempt to take a serious and comprehensive view of the world. What a

scene of confusion and chaos confronts us on every side! Sin is

rampant; lawlessness abounds; evil men and seducers are waxing "worse

and worse" (2 Tim. 3:13). Today, everything appears to be out of joint.

Thrones are creaking and tottering, ancient dynasties are being

overturned, democracies are revolting, civilisation is a demonstrated

failure; half of Christendom was but recently locked-together in a

death grapple; and now that the titanic conflict is over, instead of

the world having been made "safe for democracy," we have discovered

that democracy is very unsafe for the world. Unrest, discontent, and

lawlessness are rife everywhere, and none can say how soon another

great war will be set in motion. Statesmen are perplexed and staggered.

Men's hearts are "failing them for fear, and for looking after those

things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26). Do these things

look as though God had full control?

But let us confine our attention to the religious realm. After nineteen

centuries of Gospel preaching, Christ is still "despised and rejected

of men." Worse still, He (the Christ of Scripture) is proclaimed and

magnified by very few. In the majority of modern pulpits He is

dishonoured and disowned. Despite frantic efforts to attract the

crowds, the majority of the churches are being emptied rather than

filled. And what of the great masses of non-church goers? In the light

of Scripture we are compelled to believe that the "many" are on the

Broad Road that leadeth to destruction, and that only "few" are on the

Narrow Way that leadeth unto life. Many are declaring that Christianity

is a failure, and despair is settling on many faces. Not a few of the

Lord's own people are bewildered, and their faith is being severely

tried. And what of God? Does He see and hear? Is He impotent or

indifferent? A number of those who are regarded as leaders of

Christian-thought told us that God could not help the coming of the

late awful War, and that He was unable to bring about its termination.

It was said, and said openly, that conditions were beyond God's

control. Do these things look as though God were ruling the world?

Who is regulating affairs on this earth today-God, or the Devil? What

impression is made upon the minds of those men of the world who,

occasionally, attend a Gospel service? What are the conceptions formed

by those who hear even those preachers who are counted as "orthodox?"

Is it not that a disappointed God is the One whom Christians believe

in? From what is heard from the average evangelist today, is not any

serious hearer obliged to conclude that he professes to represent a God

who is filled with benevolent intentions, yet unable to carry them out;

that He is earnestly desirous of blessing men, but that they will not

let Him? Then, must not the average hearer draw the inference that the

Devil has gained the upper hand, and that God is to be pitied rather

than blamed?

But does not everything seem to show that the Devil has far more to do

with the affairs of earth than God has? Ah, it all depends upon whether

we are walking by faith, or walking by sight. Are your thoughts, my

reader, concerning this world and God's relation to it, based upon what

you see? Face this question seriously and honestly. And if you are a

Christian you will, most probably, have cause to bow your head with

shame and sorrow, and to acknowledge that it is so. Alas, in reality,

we walk very little "by faith." But what does "walking by faith"

signify? It means that our thoughts are formed, our actions regulated,

our lives moulded by the Holy Scriptures, for, "faith cometh by

hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). It is from the

Word of Truth, and that alone, that we can learn what is God's relation

to this world.

Who is regulating affairs on this earth today-God or the Devil? What

saith the Scriptures? Ere we consider the direct reply to this query,

let it be said that the Scriptures predicted just what we now see and

hear. The prophecy of Jude is in course of fulfilment. It would lead us

too far astray from our present inquiry to fully amplify this

assertion, but what we have particularly in mind is a sentence in verse

8-"Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise

dominion and speak evil of dignities." Yes, they "speak evil" of the

Supreme Dignity, the "Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of

lords." Ours is peculiarly an age of irreverence, and as the

consequence, the spirit of lawlessness, which brooks no restraint and

which is desirous of casting off everything which interferes with the

free course of self-will, is rapidly engulfing the earth like some

giant tidal wave. The members of the rising generation are the most

flagrant offenders, and in the decay and disappearing of parental

authority we have the certain precursor of the abolition of civic

authority. Therefore, in view of the growing disrespect for human law

and the refusal to "render honour to whom honour is due," we need not

be surprised that the recognition of the majesty, the authority, the

Sovereignty of the Almighty law-giver should recede more and more into

the background, and the masses have less and less patience with those

who insist upon them. And conditions will not improve; instead, the

more sure Word of Prophecy makes known to us that they will grow worse

and worse. Nor do we expect to be able to stem the tide-it has already

risen much too high for that. All we can now hope to do is warn our

fellow-saints against the spirit of the age, and thus seek to

counteract its baneful influence upon them.

Who is regulating affairs on this earth today-God, or the Devil? What

saith the Scriptures? If we believe their plain and positive

declarations, no room is left for uncertainty. They affirm, again and

again, that God is on the throne of the universe; that the sceptre is

in His hands; that He is directing all things "after the counsel of His

own will." They affirm, not only that God created all things, but also

that God is ruling and reigning over all the works of His hands. They

affirm that God is the "Almighty," that His will is irreversible, that

He is absolute Sovereign in every realm of all His vast dominions. And

surely it must be so. Only two alternatives are possible: God must

either rule, or be ruled; sway, or be swayed; accomplish His own will,

or be thwarted by His creatures. Accepting the fact that He is the

"Most High," the only Potentate and King of kings, vested with perfect

wisdom and illimitable power, and the conclusion is irresistible that

He must be God in fact as well as in name.

It is in view of what we have briefly referred to above that we say,

Present-day conditions call loudly for a new examination and new

presentation of God's omnipotency, God's sufficiency, God's

Sovereignty. From every pulpit in the land it needs to be thundered

forth that God still lives, that God still observes, that God still

reigns. Faith is now in the crucible, it is being tested by fire, and

there is no fixed and sufficient resting-place for the heart and mind

but in the Throne of God. What is needed now, as never before, is a

full, positive, constructive setting forth of the Godhood of God.

Drastic diseases call for drastic remedies. People are weary of

platitudes and mere generalisations-the call is for something definite

and specific. Soothing-syrup may serve for peevish children, but an

iron tonic is better suited for adults, and we know of nothing which is

more calculated to infuse spiritual vigour into our frames than a

scriptural apprehension of the full character of God. It is written,

"The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits"

(Dan. 11:32).

Without a doubt a world-crisis is at hand, and everywhere men are

alarmed. But God is not! He is never taken by surprise. It is no

unexpected emergency which now confronts Him, for He is the One who

"worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

Hence, though the world is panic-stricken, the word to the believer is,

"Fear not!" "All things" are subject to His immediate control: "all

things" are moving in accord with His eternal purpose, and therefore

"all things" are "working together for good to them that love God, to

them who are the called according to His purpose." It must be so, for

"of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things" (Rom. 11:36). Yet

how little is this realised today even by the people of God! Many

suppose that He is little more than a far-distant Spectator, taking no

immediate hand in the affairs of earth. It is true that man is endowed

with power, but God is all-powerful. It is true that, speaking

generally, the material world is regulated by law, but behind that law

is the law-Giver and law-Administrator. Man is but the creature. God is

the Creator, and endless ages before man first saw the light "the

mighty God" (Isa. 9:6) existed, and ere the world was founded, made His

plans; and being infinite in power and man only finite, His purpose and

plan cannot be withstood or thwarted by the creatures of His own hands.

We readily acknowledge that life is a profound problem, and that we are

surrounded by mystery on every side; but we are not like the beasts of

the field-ignorant of their origin, and unconscious of what is before

them. No: "We have also a more sure Word of Prophecy," of which it is

said ye do well that ye "take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a

dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts"

(2 Peter 1:19). And it is to this Word of Prophecy we indeed do well to

"take heed," to that Word which had not its origin in the mind of man

but in the Mind of God, for, "the prophecy came not at any time by the

will of man: but holy men of God spake moved by the Holy Spirit." We

say again, it is to this "Word" we do well to take heed. As we turn to

this Word and are instructed thereout, we discover a fundamental

principle which must be applied to every problem: Instead of beginning

with man and his world and working back to God, we must begin with God

and work down to man-"In the beginning God!" Apply this principle to

the present situation. Begin with the world as it is today and try and

work back to God, and everything will seem to show that God has no

connection with the world at all. But begin with God and work down to

the world, and light, much light, is cast on the problem. Because God

is holy His anger burns against sin; because God is righteous His

judgements fall upon those who rebel against Him; because God is

faithful the solemn threatenings of His Word are fulfilled; because God

is omnipotent none can successfully resist Him, still less overthrow

His counsel; and because God is omniscient no problem can master Him

and no difficulty baffle His wisdom. It is just because God is who He

is and what He is that we are now beholding on earth what we do-the

beginning of His outpoured judgements: in view of His inflexible

justice and immaculate holiness we could not expect anything other than

what is now spread before our eyes.

But let it be said very emphatically that the heart can only rest upon

and enjoy the blessed truth of the absolute Sovereignty of God as faith

is in exercise. Faith is ever occupied with God. That is the character

of it; that is what differentiates it from intellectual theology. Faith

endures "as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27): endures the

disappointments, the hardships, and the heartaches of life by

recognising that all comes from the hand of Him who is too wise to err

and too loving to be unkind. But so long as we are occupied with any

other object than God Himself there will be neither rest for the heart

nor peace for the mind. But when we receive all that enters our lives

as from His hand, then, no matter what may be our circumstances or

surroundings-whether in a hovel, a prison-dungeon, or a martyr's

stake-we shall be enabled to say, "The lines are fallen unto me in

pleasant places" (Psa. 16:6). But that is the language of faith, not of

sight or of sense.

But if instead of bowing to the testimony of Holy Writ, if instead of

walking by faith, we follow the evidence of our eyes, and reason

therefrom, we shall fall into a quagmire of virtual atheism. Or, if we

are regulated by the opinions and views of others, peace will be at an

end. Granted that there is much in this world of sin and suffering

which appals and saddens us; granted that there is much in the

providential dealings of God which startle and stagger us; that is no

reason why we should unite with the unbelieving worldling who says, "If

I were God, I would not allow this or tolerate that," etc. Better far,

in the presence of bewildering mystery, to say with one of old, "I was

dumb, I opened not my mouth: because Thou didst it" (Psa. 39:9).

Scripture tells us that God's judgements are "unsearchable," and His

ways "past finding out" (Rom. 11:33). It must be so if faith is to be

tested, confidence in His wisdom and righteousness strengthened, and

submission to His holy will fostered.

Here is the fundamental difference between the man of faith and the man

of unbelief. The unbeliever is "of the world," judges everything by

worldly standards, views life from the standpoint of time and sense,

and weighs everything in the balances of his own carnal making. But the

man of faith brings in God, looks at everything from His standpoint,

estimates values by spiritual standards, and views life in the light of

eternity. Doing this, he receives whatever comes as from the hand of

God. Doing this, his heart is calm in the midst of the storm. Doing

this, he "rejoices in hope of the glory of God."

In these opening paragraphs we have indicated the lines of thought

followed out in this book. Our first postulate is, that because God is

God He does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases;

that His great concern is the accomplishment of His own pleasure and

the promotion of His own glory; that He is the Supreme Being, and

therefore Sovereign of the universe. Starting with this postulate we

have contemplated the exercise of God's Sovereignty, first in Creation,

second in Governmental Administration over the works of His hands,

third in the Salvation of His own elect, fourth in the Reprobation of

the wicked, and fifth in Operation upon and within men. Next we have

viewed the Sovereignty of God as it relates to the human Will in

particular and human Responsibility in general, and have sought to show

what is the only becoming attitude for the creature to take in view of

the majesty of the Creator. A separate chapter has been set apart for a

consideration of some of the difficulties which are involved, and to

answering the questions which are likely to be raised in the minds of

our readers; while one chapter has been devoted to a more careful yet

brief examination of God's Sovereignty in relation to prayer. Finally,

we have sought to show that the Sovereignty of God is a truth revealed

to us in Scripture for the comfort of our hearts, the strengthening of

our souls, and the blessing of our lives. A due apprehension of God's

Sovereignty promotes the spirit of worship, provides an incentive to

practical godliness, and inspires zeal in service. It is deeply

humbling to the human heart, but in proportion to the degree that it

brings man into the dust before his Maker, to that extent is God

glorified.

We are well aware that what we have written is in open opposition to

much of the teaching that is current both in religious literature and

in the representative pulpits of the land. We freely grant that the

postulate of God's Sovereignty with all its corollaries is at direct

variance with the opinions and thoughts of the natural man, but the

truth is, we are quite unable to think upon these matters: we are

incompetent for forming a proper estimate of God's character and ways,

and it is because of this that God has given us a revelation of His

mind, and in that revelation He plainly declares, "My thoughts are not

your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as

the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your

ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8, 9). In view of

this Scripture, it is only to be expected that much of the contents of

the Bible conflicts with the sentiments of the carnal mind, which is

enmity against God. Our appeal then is not to the popular beliefs of

the day, nor to the creeds of the churches, but to the Law and

Testimony of Jehovah. All that we ask for is an impartial and attentive

examination of what we have written, and that made prayerfully in the

light of the Lamp of Truth. May the reader heed the Divine admonition

to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

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CHAPTER ONE

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY DEFINED

"Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the

victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the

earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as

Head above all"

(1 Chron. 29:11).

The Sovereignty of God is an expression that once was generally

understood. It was a phrase commonly used in religious literature. It

was a theme frequently expounded in the pulpit. It was a truth which

brought comfort to many hearts, and gave virility and stability to

Christian character. But, today, to make mention of God's Sovereignty

is, in many quarters, to speak in an unknown tongue. Were we to

announce from the average pulpit that the subject of our discourse

would be the Sovereignty of God, it would sound very much as though we

had borrowed a phrase from one of the dead languages. Alas! that it

should be so. Alas! that the doctrine which is the key to history, the

interpreter of Providence, the warp and woof of Scripture, and the

foundation of Christian theology should be so sadly neglected and so

little understood.

The Sovereignty of God. What do we mean by this expression? We mean the

supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God. To say that

God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is

Sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to

His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth,

so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (Dan.

4:35). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the

Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none

can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa.

115:3). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is "The

Governor among the nations" (Psa. 22:28), setting up kingdoms,

overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as

pleaseth Him best. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He

is the "Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim.

6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.

How different is the God of the Bible from the God of modern

Christendom! The conception of Deity which prevails most widely today,

even among those who profess to give heed to the Scriptures, is a

miserable caricature, a blasphemous travesty of the Truth. The God of

the twentieth century is a helpless, effeminate being who commands the

respect of no really thoughtful man. The God of the popular mind is the

creation of maudlin sentimentality. The God of many a present-day

pulpit is an object of pity rather than of awe-inspiring reverence. [2]

To say that God the Father has purposed the salvation of all mankind,

that God the Son died with the express intention of saving the whole

human race, and that God the Holy Spirit is now seeking to win the

world to Christ; when, as a matter of common observation, it is

apparent that the great majority of our fellowmen are dying in sin, and

passing into a hopeless eternity; is to say that God the Father is

disappointed, that God the Son is dissatisfied, and that God the Holy

Spirit is defeated. We have stated the issue baldly, but there is no

escaping the conclusion. To argue that God is "trying His best" to save

all mankind, but that the majority of men will not let Him save them,

is to insist that the will of the Creator is impotent, and that the

will of the creature is omnipotent. To throw the blame, as many do,

upon the Devil, does not remove the difficulty, for if Satan is

defeating the purpose of God, then, Satan is Almighty and God is no

longer the Supreme Being.

To declare that the Creator's original plan has been frustrated by sin,

is to dethrone God. To suggest that God was taken by surprise in Eden

and that He is now attempting to remedy an unforeseen calamity, is to

degrade the Most High to the level of a finite, erring mortal. To argue

that man is a free moral agent and the determiner of his own destiny,

and that therefore he has the power to checkmate his Maker, is to strip

God of the attribute of Omnipotence. To say that the creature has burst

the bounds assigned by his Creator, and that God is now practically a

helpless Spectator before the sin and suffering entailed by Adam's

fall, is to repudiate the express declaration of Holy Writ, namely,

"Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath

shalt Thou restrain" (Psa. 76:10). In a word, to deny the Sovereignty

of God is to enter upon a path which, if followed to its logical

terminus, is to arrive at blank atheism.

The Sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible,

infinite. When we say that God is Sovereign we affirm His right to

govern the universe which He has made for His own glory, just as He

pleases. We affirm that His right is the right of the Potter over the

clay, i. e., that He may mold that clay into whatsoever form He

chooses, fashioning out of the same lump one vessel unto honour and

another unto dishonour. We affirm that He is under no rule or law

outside of His own will and nature, that God is a law unto Himself, and

that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to

any.

Sovereignty characterises the whole Being of God. He is Sovereign in

all His attributes. He is Sovereign in the exercise of His power. His

power is exercised as He wills, when He wills, where He wills. This

fact is evidenced on every page of Scripture. For a long season that

power appears to be dormant, and then it is put forth in irresistible

might. Pharaoh dared to hinder Israel from going forth to worship

Jehovah in the wilderness-what happened? God exercised His power, His

people were delivered and their cruel task-masters slain. But a little

later, the Amalekites dared to attack these same Israelites in the

wilderness, and what happened? Did God put forth His power on this

occasion and display His hand as He did at the Red Sea? Were these

enemies of His people promptly overthrown and destroyed? No, on the

contrary, the Lord swore that He would "have war with Amalek from

generation to generation" (Exo. 17:16). Again, when Israel entered the

land of Canaan, God's power was signally displayed. The city of Jericho

barred their progress-what happened? Israel did not draw a bow nor

strike a blow: the Lord stretched forth His hand and the walls fell

down flat. But the miracle was never repeated! No other city fell after

this manner. Every other city had to be captured by the sword!

Many other instances might be adduced illustrating the Sovereign

exercise of God's power. Take one other example. God put forth His

power and David was delivered from Goliath, the giant; the mouths of

the lions were closed and Daniel escaped unhurt; the three Hebrew

children were cast into the burning fiery furnace and came forth

unharmed and unscorched. But God's power did not always interpose for

the deliverance of His people, for we read: "And others had trial of

cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with

the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being

destitute, afflicted, tormented" (Heb. 11:36, 37). But why? Why were

not these men of faith delivered like the others? Or, why were not the

others suffered to be killed like these? Why should God's power

interpose and rescue some and not the others? Why allow Stephen to be

stoned to death, and then deliver Peter from prison?

God is Sovereign in the delegation of His power to others. Why did God

endow Methuselah with a vitality which enabled him to outlive all his

contemporaries? Why did God impart to Samson a physical strength which

no other human has ever possessed? Again; it is written, "But thou

shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to

get wealth" (Deut. 8:18), but God does not bestow this power on all

alike. Why not? Why has He given such power to men like Morgan,

Carnegie, Rockefeller? The answer to all of these questions is, Because

God is Sovereign, and being Sovereign He does as He pleases.

God is Sovereign in the exercise of His mercy. Necessarily so, for

mercy is directed by the will of Him that showeth mercy. Mercy is not a

right to which man is entitled. Mercy is that adorable attribute of God

by which He pities and relieves the wretched. But under the righteous

government of God no one is wretched who does not deserve to be so. The

objects of mercy, then, are those who are miserable, and all misery is

the result of sin, hence the miserable are deserving of punishment not

mercy. To speak of deserving mercy is a contradiction of terms.

God bestows His mercies on whom He pleases and withholds them as

seemeth good unto Himself. A remarkable illustration of this fact is

seen in the manner that God responded to the prayers of two men offered

under very similar circumstances. Sentence of death was passed upon

Moses for one act of disobedience, and he besought the Lord for a

reprieve. But was his desire gratified? No; he told Israel, "The LORD

was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD

said unto me, Let it suffice thee" (Deut. 3:26). Now mark the second

case: "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet

Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the

LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then

he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, I

beseech Thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before Thee in

truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy

sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was

gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him,

saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus

saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I

have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou

shalt go unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto thy days

fifteen years" (2 Kings 20:1-6). Both of these men had the sentence of

death in themselves, and both prayed earnestly unto the Lord for a

reprieve: the one wrote: "The Lord would not hear me," and died; but to

the other it was said, "I have heard thy prayer," and his life was

spared. What an illustration and exemplification of the truth expressed

in Romans 9:15!-"For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I

will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have

compassion."

The Sovereign exercise of God's mercy-pity shown to the wretched-was

displayed when Jehovah became flesh and tabernacled among men. Take one

illustration. During one of the Feasts of the Jews, the Lord Jesus went

up to Jerusalem. He came to the Pool of Bethesda where lay "a great

multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the

moving of the water." Among this "great multitude" there was "a certain

man which had an infirmity thirty and eight years." What happened?

"When Jesus saw him He, and knew that he had been now a long time in

that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man

answer Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me

into the pool: but when I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately

the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked" (John 5:3-9).

Why was this one man singled out from all the others? We are not told

that he cried "Lord, have mercy on me." There is not a word in the

narrative which intimates that this man possessed any qualifications

which entitled him to receive special favour. Here then was a case of

the Sovereign exercise of Divine mercy, for it was just as easy for

Christ to heal the whole of that "great multitude" as this one "certain

man." But He did not. He put forth His power and relieved the

wretchedness of this one particular sufferer, and for some reason known

only to Himself, He declined to do the same for the others. Again, we

say, what an illustration and exemplification of Romans 9:15!-"I will

have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on

whom I will have compassion."

God is Sovereign in the exercise of His love. Ah! that is a hard

saying, who then can receive it? It is written, "A man can receive

nothing, except it be given him from Heaven" (John 3:27). When we say

that God is Sovereign in the exercise of His love, we mean that He

loves whom He chooses. God does not love everybody; [3] if He did, He

would love the Devil. Why does not God love the Devil? Because there is

nothing in him to love; because there is nothing in him to attract the

heart of God. Nor is there anything to attract God's love in any of the

fallen sons of Adam, for all of them are, by nature, "children of

wrath" (Eph. 2:3). If then there is nothing in any member of the human

race to attract God's love, and if, notwithstanding, He does love some,

then it necessarily follows that the cause of His love must be found in

Himself, which is only another way of saying that the exercise of God's

love towards the fallen sons of men is according to His own good

pleasure. [4]

In the final analysis, the exercise of God's love must he traced back

to His Sovereignty or, otherwise, He would love by rule; and if He

loved by rule, then is He under a law of love, and if He is under a law

of love then is He not supreme, but is Himself ruled by law. "But," it

may be asked, "Surely you do not deny that God loves the entire human

family?" We reply, it is written, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I

hated" (Rom. 9:13). If then God loved Jacob and hated Esau, and that

before they were born or had done either good or evil, then the reason

for His love was not in them, but in Himself.

That the exercise of God's love is according to His own Sovereign

pleasure is also clear from the language of Ephesians 1:3-5, where we

read, "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.

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ

to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will." It was "in

love" that God the Father predestined His chosen ones unto the adoption

of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, "according"-according to what?

According to some excellency He discovered in them? No. What then?

According to what He foresaw they would become? No; mark carefully the

inspired answer-"According to the good pleasure of His will."

We are not unmindful of the fact that men have invented the distinction

between God's love of complacency and His love of compassion, but this

is an invention pure and simple. Scripture terms the latter God's

"pity" (see Matt. 18:33), and "He is kind unto the unthankful and the

evil" (Luke 6:35)!

God is Sovereign in the exercise of His grace. This of necessity, for

grace is favour shown to the undeserving, yea, to the Hell-deserving.

Grace is the antithesis of justice. Justice demands the impartial

enforcement of law. Justice requires that each shall receive his

legitimate due, neither more nor less. Justice bestows no favours and

is no respecter of persons. Justice, as such, shows no pity and knows

no mercy. But after justice has been fully satisfied, grace flows

forth. Divine grace is not exercised at the expense of justice, but

"grace reigns through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21), and if grace

"reigns," then is grace Sovereign.

Grace has been defined as the unmerited favour of God; [5] and if

unmerited, then none can claim it as their inalienable right. If grace

is unearned and undeserved, then none are entitled to it. If grace is a

gift, then none can demand it. Therefore, as salvation is by grace, the

free gift of God, then He bestows it on whom He pleases. Because

salvation is by grace, the very chief of sinners is not beyond the

reach of Divine mercy. Because salvation is by grace, boasting is

excluded and God gets all the glory.

The Sovereign exercise of grace is illustrated on nearly every page of

Scripture. The Gentiles are left to walk in their own ways while Israel

becomes the covenant people of Jehovah. Ishmael the firstborn is cast

out comparatively unblest, while Isaac the son of his parents' old age

is made the child of promise. Esau the generous-hearted and

forgiving-spirited is denied the blessing, though he sought it

carefully with tears, while the worm Jacob receives the inheritance and

is fashioned into a vessel of honour. So in the New Testament. Divine

Truth is hidden from the wise and prudent, but is revealed to babes.

The Pharisees and Sadducees are left to go their own way, while

publicans and harlots are drawn by the cords of love.

In a remarkable manner Divine grace was exercised at the time of the

Saviour's birth. The incarnation of God's Son was one of the greatest

events in the history of the universe, and yet its actual occurrence

was not made known to all mankind; instead, it was specially revealed

to the Bethlehem shepherds and wise men of the East. And this was

prophetic and indicative of the entire course of this dispensation, for

even today Christ is not made known to all. It would have been an easy

matter for God to have sent a company of angels to every nation and to

have announced the birth of His Son. But He did not. God could have

readily attracted the attention of all mankind to the "star"; but He

did not. Why? Because God is Sovereign and dispenses His favours as He

pleases. Note particularly the two classes to whom the birth of the

Saviour was made known, namely, the most unlikely classes-illiterate

shepherds and heathen from a far country. No angel stood before the

Sanhedrin and announced the advent of Israel's Messiah! No "star"

appeared unto the scribes and lawyers as they, in their pride and

self-righteousness, searched the Scriptures! They searched diligently

to find out where He should be born, and yet it was not made known to

them when He was actually come. What a display of Divine

Sovereignty-the illiterate shepherds singled out for peculiar honour,

and the learned and eminent passed by! And why was the birth of the

Saviour revealed to these foreigners, and not to those in whose midst

He was born? See in this a wonderful foreshadowing of God's dealings

with our race throughout the entire Christian dispensation-Sovereign in

the exercise of His grace, bestowing His favours on whom He pleases,

often on the most unlikely and unworthy. [6]

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[2] Some years ago an evangelical (?) preacher of nation-wide

reputation visited the town in which we then were, and during the

course of his address kept repeating, "Poor God! Poor God!" Surely it

is this "preacher" who needs to be pitied.

[3] John 3:16 will be examined later.

[4] We are not unmindful of the fact that men have invented the

distinction between God's love of complacency and His love of

compassion, but this is an invention pure and simple. Scripture terms

the latter God's "pity" (see Matt. 18:33), and "He is kind unto the

unthankful and the evil" (Luke 6:35).

[5] An esteemed friend who kindly read through this book in its

manuscript form, and to whom we are indebted for a number of excellent

suggestions, has pointed out that grace is something more than

"unmerited favour." To feed a tramp who calls on me is "unmerited

favour," but it is scarcely grace. But suppose that after robbing me I

should feed this starving tramp-that would be "grace." Grace, then, is

favour shown where there is positive de-merit in the one receiving it.

[6] It has been pointed out to us that God's Sovereignty was signally

displayed in His choice of the place where His Son was born. Not to

Greece or Italy did the Lord of Glory come, but to the insignificant

land of Palestine! Not in Jerusalem-the royal city-was Immanuel born,

but in Bethlehem, which was "little among the thousands (of towns and

villages) in Judah" (Micah 5:2)! And it was in despised Nazareth that

He grew up!! Truly, God's ways are not ours.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN CREATION

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: for

Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were

created"

(Rev. 4:11).

Having shown that Sovereignty characterises the whole Being of God, let

us now observe how it marks all His ways and dealings.

In the great expanse of eternity which stretches behind Genesis 1:1,

the universe was unborn and creation existed only in the mind of the

great Creator. In His Sovereign majesty God dwelt all alone. We refer

to that far distant period before the heavens and the earth were

created. There were then no angels to hymn God's praises, no creatures

to occupy His notice, no rebels to be brought into subjection. The

great God was all alone amid the awful Silence of His own vast

universe. But even at that time, if time it could be called, God was

Sovereign. He might create or not create according to His own good

pleasure. He might create this way or that way; He might create one

world or one million worlds, and who was there to resist His will? He

might call into existence a million different creatures and place them

on absolute equality, endowing them with the same faculties and placing

them in the same environment; or, He might create a million creatures

each differing from the others, and possessing nothing in common save

their creaturehood, and who was there to challenge His right? If He so

pleased, He might call into existence a world so immense that its

dimensions were utterly beyond finite computation; and were He so

disposed, He might create an organism so small that nothing but the

most powerful microscope could reveal its existence to human eyes. It

was His Sovereign right to create, on the one hand, the exalted

seraphim to burn around His throne, and on the other hand, the tiny

insect which dies the same hour that it is born. If the mighty God

chose to have one vast gradation in His universe, from loftiest seraph

to creeping reptile, from revolving worlds to floating atoms, from

macrocosm to microcosm, instead of making everything uniform, who was

there to question His Sovereign pleasure?

Behold then the exercise of Divine Sovereignty long before man ever saw

the light. With whom took God counsel in the creation and disposition

of His creatures? See the birds as they fly through the air, the beasts

as they roam the earth, the fishes as they swim in the sea, and then

ask, Who was it that made them to differ? Was it not their Creator who

Sovereignly assigned their various locations and adaptations to them!

Turn your eye to the heavens and observe the mysteries of Divine

Sovereignty which there confront the thoughtful beholder: "There is one

glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of

the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory" (1 Cor.

15:41). But why should they? Why should the sun be more glorious than

all the other planets? Why should there be stars of the first magnitude

and others of the tenth? Why such amazing inequalities? Why should some

of the heavenly bodies be more favourably placed than others in their

relation to the sun? And why should there be "shooting stars," falling

stars, "wandering stars" (Jude 13), in a word, ruined stars? And the

only possible answer is, "For Thy pleasure they are and were created"

(Rev. 4:11).

Come now to our own planet. Why should two thirds of its surface be

covered with water, and why should so much of its remaining third be

unfit for human cultivation or habitation? Why should there be vast

stretches of marshes, deserts and ice-fields? Why should one country be

so inferior, topographically, from another? Why should one be fertile,

and another almost barren? Why should one be rich in minerals and

another own none? Why should the climate of one be congenial and

healthy, and another uncongenial and unhealthy? Why should one abound

in rivers and lakes, and another be almost devoid of them? Why should

one be constantly troubled with earthquakes, and another be almost

entirely free from then? Why? Because thus it pleased the Creator and

Upholder of all things.

Look at the animal kingdom and note the wondrous variety. What

comparison is possible between the lion and the lamb, the bear and the

kid, the elephant and the mouse? Some, like the horse and the dog, are

gifted with great intelligence; while others, like sheep and swine, are

almost devoid of it. Why? Some are designed to be beasts of burden,

while others enjoy a life of freedom. But why should the mule and the

donkey be shackled to a life of drudgery while the lion and tiger are

allowed to roam the jungle at their pleasure? Some are fit for food,

others unfit; some are beautiful, others ugly; some are endowed with

great strength, others are quite helpless; some are fleet of foot,

others can scarcely crawl-contrast the hare and the tortoise; some are

of use to man, others appear to be quite valueless; some live for

centuries, others a few months at most; some are tame, others fierce.

But why all these variations and differences? What is true of the

animals is equally true of the birds and fishes.

But consider now the vegetable kingdom. Why should roses have thorns,

and lilies grow without them? Why should one flower emit a fragrant

aroma and another have none? Why should one tree bear fruit which is

wholesome and another that which is poisonous? Why should one vegetable

be capable of enduring frost and another wither under it? Why should

one apple tree be loaded with fruit, and another tree of the same age

and in the same orchard be almost barren? Why should one plant flower a

dozen times in a year and another bear blossoms but once a century?

Truly, "whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in Heaven, and in the

earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Psa. 135:6).

Consider the angelic hosts. Surely we shall find uniformity here. But

no; there, as elsewhere, the same Sovereign pleasure of the Creator is

displayed. Some are higher in rank than others; some are more powerful

than others; some are nearer to God than others. Scripture reveals a

definite and well-defined gradation in the angelic orders. From

arch-angel, past seraphim and cherubim, we come to "principalities and

powers" (Eph. 3:10), and from principalities and powers to "rulers"

(Eph. 6:12), and then to the angels themselves, and even among them we

read of "the elect angels" (1 Tim. 5:21). Again we ask, Why this

inequality, this difference in rank and order? And all we can say is

"Our God is in the heavens, He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased"

(Psa. 115:3).

If then we see the Sovereignty of God displayed throughout all

creation, why should it be thought a strange thing if we behold it

operating in the midst of the human family? Why should it be thought

strange if to one God is pleased to give five talents and to another

only one? Why should it be thought strange if one is born with a robust

constitution and another of the same parents is frail and sickly? Why

should it be thought strange if Abel is cut off in his prime, while

Cain is suffered to live on for many years? Why should it be thought

strange that some should be born black and others white; some be born

idiots and others with high intellectual endowments; some be born

constitutionally lethargic and others full of energy; some be born with

a temperament that is selfish, fiery, egotistical, others who are

naturally self-sacrificing, submissive and meek? Why should it be

thought strange if some are qualified by nature to lead and rule, while

others are only fitted to follow and serve? Heredity and environment

cannot account for all these variations and inequalities. No; it is God

who maketh one to differ from another. Why should He? "Even so, Father,

for so it seemed good in Thy sight" must be our reply.

Learn then this basic truth, that the Creator is absolute Sovereign,

executing His own will, performing His own pleasure, and considering

nought but His own glory. "The LORD hath made all things FOR HIMSELF"

(Prov. 16:4). And had He not a perfect right to? Since God is God, who

dare challenge His prerogative? To murmur against Him is rank

rebellion. To question His ways is to impugn His wisdom. To criticise

Him is sin of the deepest dye. Have we forgotten who He is? Behold,

"All nations before Him as are nothing; and they are counted to Him

less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God?" (Isa.

40:17, 18).

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CHAPTER THREE

SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN ADMINISTRATION

"The LORD hath prepared His Throne In the heavens; and His Kingdom

ruleth over all"

(Psa. 103:19).

First, a word concerning the need for God to govern the material world.

Suppose the opposite for a moment. For the sake of argument, let us say

that God created the world, designed and fixed certain laws (which men

term "the laws of Nature"), and that He then withdrew, leaving the

world to its fortune and the out-working of these laws. In such a case,

we should have a world over which there was no intelligent, presiding

Governor, a world controlled by nothing more than impersonal laws-a

concept worthy of gross Materialism and blank Atheism. But, I say,

suppose it for a moment; and in the light of such a supposition weigh

well the following question: What guaranty have we that some day ere

long the world will not be destroyed? A very superficial observation of

'the laws of Nature' reveals the fact that they are not uniform in

their working. The proof of this is seen in the fact that no two

seasons are alike. If then Nature's laws are irregular in their

operations, what guaranty have we against some dreadful catastrophe

striking our earth? "The wind bloweth where it listeth" (pleaseth),

which means that man can neither harness nor hinder it. Sometimes the

wind blows with great fury, and it might be that it should suddenly

gather in volume and velocity until it became a hurricane earth-wide in

its range. If there is nothing more than the laws of Nature regulating

the wind, then, perhaps tomorrow, there may come a terrific tornado and

sweep everything from the surface of the earth! What assurance have we

against such a calamity? Again; of late years we have heard and read

much about clouds bursting and flooding whole districts, working

fearful havoc in the destruction of both property and life. Man is

helpless before them, for science can devise no means to prevent clouds

bursting. Then how do we know that these bursting clouds will not be

multiplied indefinitely and the whole earth be deluged by their

downpour? This would be nothing new: why should not the Flood of Noah's

day be repeated? And what of earthquakes? Every few years some island

or some great city is swept out of existence by one of them-and what

can man do? Where is the guaranty that ere long a mammoth earthquake

will not destroy the whole world. Science tells us of great

subterranean fires burning beneath the comparatively thin crust of our

earth. How do we know but what these fires will not suddenly burst

forth and consume our entire globe? Surely every reader now sees the

point we are seeking to make: Deny that God is governing matter, deny

that He is "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3),

and all sense of security is gone!

Let us pursue a similar course of reasoning in connection with the

human race. Is God governing this world of ours? Is He shaping the

destinies of nations, controlling the course of empires, determining

the limits of dynasties? Has He prescribed the limits of evil-doers,

saying, Thus far shalt thou go and no further? Let us suppose the

opposite for a moment. Let us assume that God has delivered over the

helm into the hand of His creatures and see where such a supposition

leads us. For the sake of argument we will say that every man enters

this world endowed with a will that is absolutely free, and that it is

impossible to compel or even coerce him without destroying his freedom.

Let us say that every man possesses a knowledge of right and wrong,

that he has the power to choose between them, and that he is left

entirely free to make his own choice and go his own way. Then what?

Then it follows that man is Sovereign, for he does as he pleases and is

the architect of his own fortune. But in such a case we can have no

assurance that ere long every man will reject the good and choose the

evil. In such a case we have no guaranty against the entire human race

committing moral suicide. Let all Divine restraints be removed and man

be left absolutely free, and all ethical distinctions would immediately

disappear, the spirit of barbarism would prevail universally, and

pandemonium would reign supreme. Why not? If one nation deposes its

rulers and repudiates its constitution, what is there to prevent all

nations from doing the same?

If little more than a century ago the streets of Paris ran with the

blood of rioters, what assurance have we that before the present

century closes every city throughout the world will not witness a

similar sight? What is there to hinder earth-wide lawlessness and

universal anarchy? Thus we have sought to show the need, the imperative

need, for God to occupy the Throne, take the government upon His

shoulder, and control the activities and destinies of His creatures.

But has the man of faith any difficulty in perceiving the government of

God over this world? Does not the anointed eye discern, even amid much

seeming confusion and chaos, the hand of the Most High controlling and

shaping the affairs of men, even in the common concerns of every day

life? Take for example farmers and their crops. Suppose God left them

to themselves: what would prevent them, one and all, from grassing

their arable lands and devoting themselves exclusively to rearing of

cattle and dairying? In such a case there would be a world-famine of

wheat and corn! Take the work of the post office. Suppose that

everybody decided to write letters on Mondays only, could the

authorities cope with the mail on Tuesdays? and how would they occupy

their time the balance of the week? So again with storekeepers. What

would happen if every housewife did her shopping on Wednesday, and

stayed at home the rest of the week? But instead of such things

happening, farmers in different countries both raise sufficient cattle

and grow enough grain of various kinds to supply the almost

incalculable needs of the human race; the mails are almost evenly

distributed over the six days of the week; and some women shop on

Monday, some on Tuesday, and so on. Do not these things clearly

evidence the overruling and controlling hand of God!

Having shown, in brief, the imperative need for God to reign over our

world, let us now observe still further the fact that God does rule,

actually rule, and that His government extends to and is exercised over

all things and all creatures.

1. GOD GOVERNS INANIMATE MATTER.

That God governs inanimate matter, that inanimate matter performs His

bidding and fulfils His decrees, is clearly shown on the very

frontispiece of Divine revelation. God said, "Let there be light," and

we read, "There was light." God said, "Let the waters under the heavens

be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear," and

"it was so." And again, "God said, Let the earth bring forth grass the

herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind,

whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so." And the

Psalmist declares, "He spake and it was done; He commanded, and it

stood fast."

What is stated in Genesis One is afterwards illustrated all through the

Bible. After the creation of Adam, sixteen centuries went by before

ever a shower of rain fell upon the earth, for before Noah "there went

up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground"

(Gen. 2:6). But, when the iniquities of the antediluvians had come to

the full, then God said, "And, behold, I even I, do bring a flood of

waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of

life, from under Heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall

die"; and in fulfilment of this we read, "In the six hundredth year of

Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the

same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the

windows of Heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty

days and forty nights" (Gen. 6:17 and 7:11, 12).

Witness God's absolute (and Sovereign) control of inanimate matter in

connection with the plagues of Egypt. At His bidding the light was

turned into darkness and rivers into blood; hail fell, and death came

down upon the godless land of the Nile, until even its haughty monarch

was compelled to cry out for deliverance. Note particularly how the

inspired record here emphasises God's absolute control over the

elements-"And Moses stretched forth his rod toward Heaven: and the LORD

sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the

LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire

mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in

all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote

throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man

and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every

tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of

Israel were, was there no hail" (Exo. 9:23-26). The same distinction

was observed in connection with the ninth plague: "And the LORD said

unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward Heaven, that there may be

darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. And

Moses stretched forth his hand toward Heaven; and there was a thick

darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another,

neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of

Israel had light in their dwellings" (Exo. 10:21-23).

The above examples are by no means isolated cases. At God's decree fire

and brimstone descended from Heaven and the cities of the Plain were

destroyed, and a fertile valley was converted into a loathsome sea of

death. At His bidding the waters of the Red Sea parted asunder so that

the Israelites passed over dry shod, and at His word they rolled back

again and destroyed the Egyptians who were pursuing them. A word from

Him, and the earth opened her mouth and Korah and his rebellious

company were swallowed up. The furnace of Nebuchadnezzar was heated

seven times beyond its normal temperature, and into it three of God's

children were cast, but the fire did not so much as scorch their

clothes, though it slew the men who cast them into it.

What a demonstration of the Creator's governmental control over the

elements was furnished when He became flesh and tabernacled among men!

Behold Him asleep in the boat. A storm arises. The winds roar and the

waves are lashed into fury. The disciples who are with Him, fearful

lest their little craft should founder, awake their Master, saying,

"Carest Thou not that we perish?" And then we read, "And He arose, and

rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind

ceased, and there was a great calm" (Mark 4:39). Mark again, the sea,

at the will of its Creator, bore Him up upon its waves. At a word from

Him, the fig-tree withered; at His touch disease fled instantly.

The heavenly bodies are also ruled by their Maker and perform His

Sovereign pleasure. Take two illustrations. At God's bidding the sun

went back ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz to help the weak faith of

Hezekiah. In New Testament times, God caused a star to herald the

incarnation of His Son-the star which appeared unto the wise men of the

East. This star, we are told, "went before them till it came and stood

over where the young Child was" (Matt. 2:9).

What a declaration is this: "He sendeth forth His commandment upon

earth: His word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool: He

scattereth the hoar frost like ashes. He casteth forth His ice like

morsels: who can stand before His cold? He sendeth out His word, and

melteth them: He causeth His wind to blow, and the waters flow" (Psa.

147:15-18). The mutations of the elements are beneath God's Sovereign

control. It is God who withholds the rain, and it is God who gives the

rain when He wills, where He wills, as He wills, and on whom He wills.

Weather Bureaux may attempt to give forecasts of the weather, but how

frequently God mocks their calculations! Sun 'spots,' the varying

activities of the planets, the appearing and disappearing of comets (to

which abnormal weather is sometimes attributed), atmospheric

disturbances, are merely secondary causes, for behind them all is God

Himself. Let His Word speak once more: "And also I have withholden the

rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I

caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another

city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereon it rain not

withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink

water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto Me,

saith the LORD. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your

gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees

increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto

Me, saith the LORD. I have sent among you the pestilence after the

manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have

taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come

up into your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the

LORD" (Amos 4:7-10).

Truly, then, God governs inanimate matter. Earth and air, fire and

water, hail and snow, stormy winds and angry seas, all perform the word

of His power and fulfil His Sovereign pleasure. Therefore, when we

complain about the weather we are, in reality, murmuring against God.

2. GOD GOVERNS IRRATIONAL CREATURES.

What a striking illustration of God's government over the animal

kingdom is found in Genesis 2:19! "And out of the ground the LORD God

formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air: and brought

them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam

called every living creature, that was the name thereof." Should it be

said that this occurred in Eden, and took place before the fall of Adam

and the consequent curse which was inflicted on every creature, then

our next reference fully meets the objection: God's control of the

beasts was again openly displayed at the Flood. Mark how God caused to

"come unto" Noah every specie of living creature "of every living thing

of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep

them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after

their kind, of every creeping thing after his kind: two of every sort

shall come unto thee" (Gen. 6:19, 20)-all were beneath God's Sovereign

control. The lion of the jungle, the elephant of the forest, the bear

of the polar regions; the ferocious panther, the untameable wolf, the

fierce tiger; the high-soaring eagle and the creeping crocodile-see

them all in their native fierceness, and yet, quietly submitting to the

will of their Creator, and coming two by two into the ark!

We referred to the plagues sent upon Egypt as illustrating God's

control of inanimate matter, let us now turn to them again to see how

they demonstrate His perfect rulership over irrational creatures. At

His Word the river brought forth frogs abundantly, and these frogs

entered the palace of Pharaoh and the houses of his servants and,

contrary to their natural instincts, they entered the beds, the ovens

and the kneadingtroughs (Exo. 8:13). Swarms of flies invaded the land

of Egypt, but there were no flies in the land of Goshen! (Exo. 8:22).

Next, the cattle were stricken, and we read, "Behold, the hand of the

LORD is upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the

sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain. And the LORD shall sever

between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt: and there shall

nothing die of all that is the children's of Israel. And the LORD

appointed a set time, saying, Tomorrow the LORD shall do this thing in

the land. And the LORD did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle

of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not

one" (Exo. 9:3-6). In like manner God sent clouds of locusts to plague

Pharaoh and his land, appointing the time of their visitation,

determining the course and assigning the limits of their depredations.

Angels are not the only ones who do God's bidding. The brute beasts

equally perform His pleasure. The sacred ark, the ark of the covenant,

is in the country of the Philistines. How is it to be brought back to

its home land? Mark the servants of God's choice, and how completely

they were beneath His control: "And the Philistines called for the

priests and the diviners saying, What shall we do to the ark of the

Lord? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place. And they said...

Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there

hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves

home from them: And take the ark of the Lord, and lay it upon the cart;

and put the jewels of gold, which ye return Him for a trespass

offering, in a coffer by the side thereof, and send it away that it may

go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh,

then He hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know

that it is not His hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to

us." And what happened? How striking the sequel! "And the kine took the

straight way to the way of Bethshemesh, and went along the highway,

lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the

left" (1 Sam. 6:12). Equally striking is the case of Elijah: "And the

word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and hide

thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be,

that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to

feed thee there" (1 Kings 17:2-4). The natural instinct of these birds

of prey was held in subjection, and instead of consuming the food

themselves, they carried it to Jehovah's servant in his solitary

retreat.

Is further proof required? then it is ready at hand. God makes a dumb

ass to rebuke the prophet's madness. He sends forth two she-bears from

the woods to devour forty and two of Elijah's tormentors. In fulfilment

of His word, He causes the dogs to lick up the blood of the wicked

Jezebel. He seals the mouths of Babylon's lions when Daniel is cast

into the den, though, later, He causes them to devour the prophet's

accusers. He prepares a great fish to swallow the disobedient Jonah and

then, when His ordained hour struck, compelled it to vomit him forth on

dry land. At His biding a fish carries a coin to Peter for tribute

money, and in order to fulfil His word He makes the cock crow twice

after Peter's denial. Thus we see that God reigns over irrational

creatures: beasts of the field, birds of the air, fishes of the sea,

all perform His Sovereign bidding.

3. GOD GOVERNS THE CHILDREN OF MEN.

We fully appreciate the fact that this is the most difficult part of

our subject, and, accordingly, it will be dealt with at greater length

in the pages that follow; but at present we consider the fact of God's

government over men in general, before we attempt to deal with the

problem in detail.

Two alternatives confront us, and between them we are obliged to

choose: either God governs, or He is governed; either God rules, or He

is ruled; either God has His way, or men have theirs.

And is our choice between these alternatives hard to make? Shall we say

that in man we behold a creature so unruly that he is beyond God's

control? Shall we say that sin has alienated the sinner so far from the

thrice Holy One that he is outside the pale of His jurisdiction? Or,

shall we say that man has been endowed with moral responsibility, and

therefore God must leave him entirely free, at least during the period

of his probation? Does it necessarily follow because the natural man is

an outlaw against Heaven, a rebel against the Divine government, that

God is unable to fulfil His purpose through him? We mean, not merely

that He may overrule the effects of the actions of evil-doers, nor that

He will yet bring the wicked to stand before His judgement-bar so that

sentence of punishment may be passed upon them-multitudes of

non-Christians believe these things-but, we mean, that every action of

the most lawless of His subjects is entirely beneath His control, yea

that the actor is, though unknown to himself, carrying out the secret

decrees of the Most High. Was it not thus with Judas? and is it

possible to select a more extreme case? If then the arch-rebel was

performing the counsel of God is it any greater tax upon our faith to

believe the same of all rebels?

Our present object is no philosophic inquiry nor metaphysical

casuistry, but to ascertain the teaching of Scripture upon this

profound theme. To the Law and the Testimony, for there only can we

learn of the Divine government-its character, its design, its modus

operandi, its scope. What then has it pleased God to reveal to us in

His blessed Word concerning His rule over the works of His hands, and

particularly, over the one who originally was made in His own image and

likeness?

"In Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). What a

sweeping assertion is this! These words, be it noted, were addressed,

not to one of the churches of God, not to a company of saints who had

reached an exalted plane of spirituality, but to a heathen audience, to

those who worshipped "the unknown God" and who "mocked" when they heard

of the resurrection of the dead. And yet, to the Athenian philosophers,

to the Epicureans and Stoics, the Apostle Paul did not hesitate to

affirm that they lived and moved and had their being in God, which

signified not only that they owed their existence and preservation to

the One who made the world and all things therein, but also that their

very actions were encompassed and therefore controlled by the Lord of

Heaven and earth. Compare Daniel 5:23, last clause!

"The disposings (margin) of the heart, and the answer of the tongue is

from the LORD" (Prov. 16:1). Mark that the above declaration is of

general application-it is of "man," not simply of believers, that this

is predicated. "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth

his steps" (Prov. 16:9). If the Lord directs the steps of a man, is it

not proof that he is being controlled or governed by God? Again: "There

are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the

LORD, that shall stand" (Prov. 19:21). Can this mean anything less

than, that no matter what man may desire and plan, it is the will of

his Maker which is executed? As an illustration take the "Rich Fool."

The "devices" of his heart are made known to us-"And he thought within

himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to

bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my

barns, and build greater; and there I will bestow all my fruits and my

goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up

for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Such were

the "devices" of his heart, nevertheless it was "the counsel of the

Lord" that stood. The "I will's" of the rich man came to nought, for

"God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of

thee" (Luke 12:17-20).

"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water:

He turneth it whithersoever He will (Prov. 21:1). What could be more

explicit? Out of the heart are "the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23), for

as a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). If then the

heart is in the hand of the Lord, and if "He turneth it whithersoever

He will," then is it not clear that men, yea, governors and rulers, and

so all men, are completely beneath the governmental control of the

Almighty!

No limitations must be placed upon the above declarations. To insist

that some men, at least, do thwart God's will and overturn His

counsels, is to repudiate other Scriptures equally explicit. Weigh well

the following: "But He is one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His

soul desireth, even that He doeth" (Job 23:13). "The counsel of the

LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations"

(Psa. 33:11). "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against

the LORD" (Prov. 21:30). "For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who

shall disannul it? And His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it

back?" (Isa. 14:27). "Remember the former things of old: for I am God,

and there is none else! I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring

the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are

not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My

pleasure" (Isa. 46:9, 10). There is no ambiguity in these passages.

They affirm in the most unequivocal and unqualified terms that it is

impossible to bring to naught the purpose of Jehovah.

We read the Scriptures in vain if we fail to discover that the actions

of men, evil men as well as good, are governed by the Lord God. Nimrod

and his fellows determined to erect the tower of Babel, but ere their

task was accomplished God frustrated their plans. God called Abraham

"alone" (Isa. 51:2), but his kinsfolk accompanied him as he left Ur of

the Chaldees. Was then the will of the Lord defeated? Nay, verily. Mark

the sequel. Terah died before Canaan was reached (Gen. 11:32), and

though Lot accompanied his uncle into the land of promise, he soon

separated from him and settled down in Sodom. Jacob was the child to

whom the inheritance was promised, and though Isaac sought to reverse

Jehovah's decree and bestow the blessing upon Esau, his efforts came to

naught. Esau again swore vengeance upon Jacob, but when next they met

they wept for joy instead of fighting in hate. The brethren of Joseph

determined his destruction but their evil counsels were overthrown.

Pharaoh refused to let Israel carry out the instructions of Jehovah and

perished in the Red Sea for his pains. Balak hired Balaam to curse the

Israelites but God compelled him to bless them. Haman erected a gallows

for Mordecai but was hanged upon it himself. Jonah resisted the

revealed will of God but what became of his efforts?

Ah, the heathen may "rage" and the people imagine a "vain thing"; the

kings of earth may "set themselves," and the rulers take counsel

together against the Lord and against His Christ, saying, "Let us break

Their bands asunder, and cast away Their cords from us (Psa. 2:1-3).

But is the great God perturbed or disturbed by the rebellion of his

puny creatures? No, indeed: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall

laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision" (v. 4). He is infinitely

exalted above all, and the greatest confederacies or earth's pawns, and

their most extensive and vigorous preparations to defeat His purpose

are, in His sight, altogether puerile. He looks upon their puny

efforts, not only without any alarm, but He "laughs" at their folly; He

treats their impotency with "derision." He knows that He can crush them

like moths when He pleases, or consume them in a moment with the breath

of His mouth. Ah, it is but "a vain thing" for the potsherds of the

earth to strive with the glorious Majesty of Heaven. Such is our God;

worship ye Him.

Mark, too, the Sovereignty which God displayed in His dealings with

men! Moses who was slow of speech, and not Aaron his elder brother who

was not slow of speech, was the one chosen to be His ambassador in

demanding from Egypt's monarch the release of His oppressed people.

Moses again, though greatly beloved, utters one hasty word and was

excluded from Canaan; whereas Elijah, passionately murmurs and suffers

but a mild rebuke, and was afterwards taken to Heaven without seeing

death! Uzzah merely touched the ark and was instantly slain, whereas

the Philistines carried it off in insulting triumph and suffered no

immediate harm. Displays of grace which would have brought a doomed

Sodom to repentance failed to move an highly privileged Capernaum.

Mighty works which would have subdued Tyre and Sidon left the upbraided

cities of Galilee under the curse of a rejected Gospel. If they would

have prevailed over the former, why were they not wrought there? If

they proved ineffectual to deliver the latter then why perform them?

What exhibitions are these of the Sovereign will of the Most High!

4. GOD GOVERNS ANGELS: BOTH GOOD AND EVIL ANGELS.

The angels are God's servants, His messengers, His chariots. They ever

hearken to the word of His mouth and do His commands. "And God sent an

angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD

beheld, and He repented Him of the evil, and said to the angel that

destroyed. It is enough, stay now thine hand... And the LORD commanded

the angel; and he put his sword again into the sheath thereof" (1

Chron. 21:15, 27). Many other Scriptures might be cited to show that

the angels are in subjection to the will of their Creator and perform

His bidding -"And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know

of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me

out of the hand of Herod" (Acts 12:11). "And the Lord God of the holy

prophets sent His angel to shew unto His servants the things which must

shortly be done" (Rev. 22:6). So it will be when our Lord returns: "The

Son of Man shall send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His

kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (Matt.

13:41). Again, we read, "He shall send His angels with a great sound of

a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four

winds, from one end of Heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:31).

The same is true of evil spirits: they, too, fulfil God's Sovereign

decrees. An evil spirit is sent by God to stir up rebellion in the camp

of Abimelech: "Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the

men of Shechem," which aided him in the killing of his brethren (Judges

9:23). Another evil spirit He sent to be a lying spirit in the mouth of

Ahab's prophets-"Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying

spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken

evil concerning thee" (1 Kings 22:23). And yet another was sent by the

Lord to trouble Saul-"But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul,

and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him" (1 Sam. 16:14). So, too,

in the New Testament: a whole legion of the demons go not out of their

victim until the Lord gave them permission to enter the herd of swine.

It is clear from Scripture, then, that the angels, good and evil, are

under God's control, and willingly or unwillingly carry out God's

purpose. Yea, SATAN himself is absolutely subject to God's control.

When arraigned in Eden, he listened to the awful sentence but answered

not a word. He was unable to touch Job until God granted him leave. So,

too, he had to gain our Lord's consent before he could "sift" Peter.

When Christ commanded him to depart-"Get thee hence, Satan"-we read,

"Then the Devil leaveth Him" (Matt. 4:11). And, in the end, he will be

cast into the Lake of Fire which has been prepared for him and his

angels.

The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. His government is exercised over

inanimate matter, over the brute beasts, over the children of men, over

angels good and evil, and over Satan himself. No revolving world, no

shining of star, no storm, no creature moves, no actions of men, no

errands of angels, no deeds of Devil-nothing in all the vast universe

can come to pass otherwise than God has eternally purposed. Here is a

foundation of faith. Here is a resting place for the intellect. Here is

an anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast. It is not blind fate,

unbridled evil, man or Devil, but the Lord Almighty who is ruling the

world, ruling it according to His own good pleasure and for His own

eternal glory.

"Ten thousand ages ere the skies

Were into motion brought;

All the long years and worlds to come,

Stood present to His thought:

There's not a sparrow nor a worm,

But's found in His decrees,

He raises monarchs to their thrones

And sings as He may please."

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN SALVATION

"O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

how unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out"

(Rom. 11:33).

"Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9); but the Lord does not save all.

Why not? He does save some; then if He saves some, why not others? Is

it because they are too sinful and depraved? No; for the Apostle wrote,

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ

Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim.

1:15). Therefore, if God saved the "chief" of sinners, none are

excluded because of their depravity. Why then does not God save all? Is

it because some are too stony-hearted to be won? No; because it is

written, that God will "take the stony heart out of their flesh, and

will give them a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 11:19). Then is it because some

are so stubborn, so intractable, so defiant that God is unable to woo

them to Himself? Before we answer this question let us ask another; let

us appeal to the experience of the Christian reader.

Friend, was there not a time when you walked in the counsel of the

ungodly, stood in the way of sinners, sat in the seat of the scorners,

and with them said, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke

19:14)? Was there not a time when you "would not come to Christ that

you might have life" (John 5:40)? Yea, was there not a time when you

mingled your voice with those who said unto God, "Depart from us; for

we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we

should serve Him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?"

(Job 21:14, 15)? With shamed face you have to acknowledge there was.

But how is it that all is now changed? What was it that brought you

from haughty self-sufficiency to a humble suppliant; from one that was

at enmity with God to one that is at peace with Him; from lawlessness

to subjection; from hate to love? And as one 'born of the Spirit' you

will readily reply, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor.

15:10). Then do you not see that it is due to no lack of power in God,

nor to His refusal to coerce man, that other rebels are not saved too?

If God was able to subdue your will and win your heart, and that

without interfering with your moral responsibility, then is He not able

to do the same for others? Assuredly He is. Then how inconsistent, how

illogical, how foolish of you, in seeking to account for the present

course of the wicked and their ultimate fate, to argue that God is

unable to save them, that they will not let Him. Do you say, "But the

time came when I was willing, willing to receive Christ as my Saviour"?

True, but it was the Lord who made you willing (Psa. 110:3; Phil.

2:13); why then does He not make all sinners willing? Why, but for the

fact that He is Sovereign and does as He pleases! But to return to our

opening inquiry.

Why is it that all are not saved, particularly all who hear the Gospel?

Do you still answer, Because the majority refuse to believe? Well, that

is true, but it is only a part of the truth. It is the truth from the

human side. But there is a Divine side too, and this side of the truth

needs to be stressed or God will be robbed of His glory. The unsaved

are lost because they refuse to believe; the others are saved because

they believe. But why do these others believe? What is it that causes

them to put their trust in Christ? Is it because they are more

intelligent than their fellows, and quicker to discern their need of

salvation? Perish the thought-"Who maketh thee to differ from another?

And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst

receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1

Cor. 4:7). It is God Himself who maketh the difference between the

elect and the non-elect, for of His own it is written, "And we know

that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that

we may know Him that is true" (1 John 5:20).

Faith is God's gift, and "all men have not faith" (2 Thess. 3:2);

therefore, we see that God does not bestow this gift upon all. Upon

whom then does He bestow this saving favour? And we answer, upon His

own elect-"As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts

13:48). Hence it is that we read of "the faith of God's elect" (Titus

1:1). But is God partial in the distribution of His favours? Has He not

the right to be? Are there still some who murmur against the Goodman of

the house'? Then His own words are sufficient reply-"Is it not lawful

for Me to do what I will with Mine own?" (Matt. 20:15). God is

Sovereign in the bestowment of His gifts, both in the natural and in

the spiritual realms. So much then for a general statement, and now to

particularise.

1. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD THE FATHER IN SALVATION.

Perhaps the one Scripture which most emphatically of all asserts the

absolute Sovereignty of God in connection with His determining the

destiny of His creatures, is the Ninth of Romans. We shall not attempt

to review here the entire chapter, but will confine ourselves to verses

21-23- "Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to

make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God,

willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with

much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that

He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy,

which He had afore prepared unto glory?" These verses represent fallen

mankind as inert and as impotent as a lump of lifeless clay. This

Scripture evidences that there is "no difference," in themselves,

between the elect and the non-elect; they are clay of "the same lump,"

which agrees with Ephesians 2:3, where we are told that all are by

nature "children of wrath." It teaches us that the ultimate destiny of

every individual is decided by the will of God, and blessed it is that

such be the case; if it were left to our wills, the ultimate

destination of us all would be the Lake of Fire. It declares that God

Himself does make a difference in the respective destinations to which

He assigns His creatures, for one vessel is made "unto honour and

another unto dishonour"; some are "vessels of wrath fitted to

destruction," others are "vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared

unto glory."

We readily acknowledge that it is very humbling to the proud heart of

the creature to behold all mankind in the hand of God as the clay in

the potter's hand, yet this is precisely how the Scriptures of Truth

represent the case. In this day of human boasting, intellectual pride,

and deification of man, it needs to be insisted upon that the potter

forms his vessels for himself. Let man strive with his Maker as he

will, the fact remains that he is nothing more than clay in the

Heavenly Potter's hands, and while we know that God will deal justly

with His creatures, that the Judge of all the earth will do right,

nevertheless, He shapes His vessels for His own purpose and according

to His own pleasure. God claims the indisputable right to do as He

wills with His own.

Not only has God the right to do as He wills with the creatures of His

own hands, but He exercises this right, and nowhere is that seen more

plainly than in His predestinating grace. Before the foundation of the

world God made a choice, a selection, an election. Before His

omniscient eye stood the whole of Adam's race, and from it He singled

out a people and predestinated them "to be conformed to the image of

His Son," "ordained" them unto eternal life. Many are the Scriptures

which set forth this blessed truth, seven of which will now engage our

attention.

"As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed" (Acts 13:48).

Every artifice of human ingenuity has been employed to blunt the sharp

edge of this Scripture and to explain away the obvious meaning of these

words, but it has been employed in vain, though nothing will ever be

able to reconcile this and similar passages to the mind of the natural

man. "As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed." Here we

learn four things: First, that believing is the consequence and not the

cause of God's decree. Second, that a limited number only are "ordained

to eternal life," for if all men without exception were thus ordained

by God, then the words "as many as" are a meaningless qualification.

Third, that this "ordination" of God is not to mere external privileges

but to "eternal life," not to service but to salvation itself. Fourth,

that all-"as many as," not one less-who are thus ordained by God to

eternal life will most certainly believe.

The comments of the beloved Spurgeon on the above passage are well

worthy of our notice. Said he, "Attempts have been made to prove that

these words do not teach predestination, but these attempts so clearly

do violence to language that I shall not waste time in answering them.

I read: 'As many as were ordained to eternal life believed,' and I

shall not twist the text but shall glorify the grace of God by

ascribing to that grace the faith of every man. Is it not God who gives

the disposition to believe? If men are disposed to have eternal life,

does not He-in every case-dispose them? Is it wrong for God to give

grace? If it be right for Him to give it, is it wrong for Him to

purpose to give it? Would you have Him give it by accident? If it is

right for Him to purpose to give grace today, it was right for Him to

purpose it before today-and, since He changes not-from eternity."

"Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to

the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works:

otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no

more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:5, 6). The words

"Even so" at the beginning of this quotation refer us to the previous

verse where we are told, "I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men

who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Note particularly the word

"reserved." In the days of Elijah there were seven thousand-a small

minority-who were Divinely preserved from idolatry and brought to the

knowledge of the true God. This preservation and illumination was not

from anything in themselves, but solely by God's special influence and

agency. How highly favoured such individuals were to be thus "reserved"

by God! Now says the Apostle, Just as there was a "remnant" in Elijah's

days "reserved by God," even so there is in this present dispensation.

"A remnant according to the election of grace." Here the cause of

election is traced back to its source. The basis upon which God elected

this "remnant" was not faith foreseen in them, because a choice founded

upon the foresight of good works is just as truly made on the ground of

works as any choice can be, and in such a case it would not be "of

grace"; for, says the Apostle, "if by grace, then it is no more of

works: otherwise grace is no more grace"; which means that grace and

works are opposites, they have nothing in common, and will no more

mingle than oil and water. Thus the idea of inherent good foreseen in

those chosen, or of anything meritorious performed by them, is rigidly

excluded. "A remnant according to the election of grace" signifies an

unconditional choice resulting from the Sovereign favour of God; in a

word, it is absolutely a gratuitous election.

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after

the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath

chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God

hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which

are mighty: and base things of the world, and things which are

despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to

nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1

Cor. 1:26-29). Three times over in this passage reference is made to

God's choice, and choice necessarily supposes a selection, the taking

of some and the leaving of others. The Chooser here is God Himself, as

said the Lord Jesus to the Apostles, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have

chosen you" (John 15:16). The number chosen is strictly defined-"not

many wise men after the flesh, not many noble," etc., which agree with

Matthew 20:16, "So the last shall be first, and the first last; for

many be called, but few chosen." So much then for the fact of God's

choice; now mark the objects of His choice.

The ones spoken of above as chosen of God are "the weak things of the

world, base things of the world, and things which are despised." But

why? To demonstrate and magnify His grace. God's ways as well as His

thoughts are utterly at variance with man's. The carnal mind would have

supposed that a selection had been made from the ranks of the opulent

and influential, the amiable and cultured, so that Christianity might

have won the approval and applause of the world by its pageantry and

fleshly glory. Ah, but "that which is highly esteemed among men is

abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). God chooses the "base

things." He did so in Old Testament times. The nation which He singled

out to be the depository of His holy oracles and the channel through

which the promised Seed should come was not the ancient Egyptians, the

imposing Babylonians, nor the highly civilised and cultured Greeks. No;

that people upon whom Jehovah set His love and regarded as 'the apple

of His eye' were the despised, nomadic Hebrews. So it was when our Lord

tabernacled among men. The ones whom He took into favoured intimacy

with Himself and commissioned to go forth as His ambassadors were, for

the most part, unlettered fishermen. And so it has been ever since. So

it is today: at the present rates of increase, it will not be long

before it is manifested that the Lord has more in despised China who

are really His, than He has in the highly favoured U.S.A.; more among

the uncivilised blacks of Africa, than He has in cultured (?) Germany!

And the purpose of God's choice, the raison d' etre of the selection He

has made is, "that no flesh should glory in His presence"-there being

nothing whatever in the objects of His choice which should entitle them

to His special favours, then, all the praise will be freely ascribed to

the exceeding riches of His manifold grace.

"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; having

predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to

Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will... 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" (Eph. 1:3-5, 11). Here again we are told at what point in time-if

time it could be called-when God made choice of those who were to be

His children by Jesus Christ. It was not after Adam had fallen and

plunged his race into sin and wretchedness, but long ere Adam saw the

light, even before the world itself was founded, that God chose us in

Christ. Here also we learn the purpose which God had before Him in

connection with His own elect: it was that they "should be holy and

without blame before Him"; it was "unto the adoption of children"; it

was that they should "obtain an inheritance." Here also we discover the

motive which prompted Him. It was "in love that He predestinated us

unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself"-a statement

which refutes the oft made and wicked charge that, for God to decide

the eternal destiny of His creatures before they are born, is

tyrannical and unjust. Finally, we are informed here, that in this

matter He took counsel with none, but that we are "predestinated

according to the good pleasure of His will."

"But 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"

(2 Thess. 2:13). There are three things here which deserve special

attention. First, the fact that we are expressly told that God's elect

are "chosen to salvation." Language could not be more explicit. How

summarily do these words dispose of the sophistries and equivocations

of all who would make election refer to nothing but external privileges

or rank in service! It is to "salvation" itself that God hath chosen

us. Second, we are warned here that election unto salvation does not

disregard the use of appropriate means: salvation is reached through

"sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." It is not true

that because God has chosen a certain one to salvation that he will be

saved willy-nilly, whether he believes or not: nowhere do the

Scriptures so represent it. The same God who predestined the end also

appointed the means; the same God who "chose unto salvation" decreed

that His purpose should be realised through the work of the Spirit and

belief of the truth. Third, that God has chosen us unto salvation is a

profound cause for fervent praise. Note how strongly the Apostle

expresses this-"we are bound to give thanks always to God for you,

brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning

chosen you to salvation," etc. Instead of shrinking hack in horror from

the doctrine of predestination, the believer, when he sees this blessed

truth as it is unfolded in the Word, discovers a ground for gratitude

and thanksgiving such as nothing else affords, save the unspeakable

gift of the Redeemer Himself.

"Who 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" (2 Tim. 1:9). How

plain and pointed is the language of Holy Writ! It is man who, by his

words, darkeneth counsel. It is impossible to state the case more

clearly, or strongly, than it is stated here. Our salvation is not

"according to our works"; that is to say, it is not due to anything in

us, nor the rewarding of anything from us; instead, it is the result of

God's own "purpose and grace"; and this grace was given us in Christ

Jesus before the world began. It is by grace we are saved, and in the

purpose of God this grace was bestowed upon us not only before we saw

the light, not only before Adam's fall, but even before that far

distant "beginning" of Genesis 1:1. And herein lies the unassailable

comfort of God's people. If His choice has been from eternity it will

last to eternity! "Nothing can survive to eternity but what came from

eternity, and what has so come, will" (George S. Bishop).

"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through

sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the

blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2). Here again election by the Father

precedes the work of the Holy Spirit in, and the obedience of faith by,

those who are saved; thus taking it entirely off creature ground, and

resting it in the Sovereign pleasure of the Almighty. The

"foreknowledge of God the Father" does not here refer to His prescience

of all things, but signifies that the saints were all eternally present

in Christ before the mind of God. God did not "foreknow" that certain

ones who heard the Gospel would believe it apart from the fact that He

had "ordained" these certain ones to eternal life. What God's

prescience saw in all men was, love of sin and hatred of Himself. The

"foreknowledge" of God is based upon His own decrees as is clear from

Acts 2:23-"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and

foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified

and slain"-note the order here: first God's "determinate counsel" (His

decree), and second His "foreknowledge." So it is again in Romans 8:28,

29, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed

to the image of His Son," but the first word here, "for," looks back to

the preceding verse and the last clause of its reads, "to them who are

the called according to His purpose"-these are the ones whom He did

"foreknow and predestinate." Finally, it needs to be pointed out that

when we read in Scripture of God "knowing" certain people the word is

used in the sense of knowing with approbation and love: "But if any man

love God, the same is known of Him" (1 Cor. 8:3). To the hypocrites

Christ will yet say "I never knew you"-He never loved them. "Elect

according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" signifies, then,

chosen by Him as the special objects of His approbation and love.

Summarising the teaching of these seven passages we learn that, God has

"ordained to eternal life" certain ones, and that in consequence of His

ordination they, in due time, "believe"; that God's ordination to

salvation of His own elect is not due to any good thing in them nor to

anything meritorious from them, but solely of "His grace"; that God has

designedly selected the most unlikely objects to be the recipients of

His special favours in order that "no flesh should glory in His

presence"; that God chose His people in Christ before the foundation of

the world, not because they were so, but in order that they "should be

holy and without blame before Him"; that having selected certain ones

to salvation. He also decreed the means by which His eternal counsel

should be made good; that the very "grace" by which we are saved was,

in God's purpose, "given us in Christ Jesus before the world began";

that long before they were actually created God's elect stood present

before His mind, were "foreknown" by Him, i.e., were the definite

objects of His eternal love.

Before turning to the next division of this chapter, a further word

concerning the subjects of God's predestinating grace. We go over this

ground again because it is at this point that the doctrine of God's

Sovereignty in predestining certain ones to salvation is most

frequently assaulted. Perverters of this truth invariably seek to find

some cause outside God's own will which moves Him to bestow salvation

on sinners; something or other is attributed to the creature which

entitles him to receive mercy at the hands of the Creator. We return

then to the question, Why did God choose the ones He did?

What was there in the elect themselves which attracted God's heart to

them? Was it because of certain virtues they possessed? because they

were generous-hearted, sweet-tempered, truth-speaking? in a word,

because they were "good," that God chose them? No; for our Lord said,

"There is none good but one, that is God" (Matt. 19:17). Was it because

of any good works they had performed? No; for it is written, "There is

none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12). Was it because they

evidenced an earnestness and zeal in inquiring after God? No; for it is

written again, "There is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11). Was

it because God foresaw they would believe? No; for how can those who

are "dead in trespasses and sins" believe in Christ? How could God

foreknow some men as believers when belief was impossible to them?

Scripture declares that we "believe through grace" (Acts 18:27). Faith

is God's gift, and apart from this gift none would believe. The cause

of His choice then lies within Himself and not in the objects of His

choice. He chose the ones He did simply because He chose to choose

them.

"Sons we are by God's election

Who on Jesus Christ believe,

By eternal destination,

Sovereign grace we now receive,

Lord Thy mercy,

Doth both grace and glory give!"

2. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD THE SON IN SALVATION.

For whom did Christ die? It surely does not need arguing that the

Father had an express purpose in giving Him to die, or that God the Son

had a definite design before Him in laying down His life-"Known unto

God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18).

What then was the purpose of the Father and the design of the Son. We

answer, Christ died for "God's elect."

We are not unmindful of the fact that the limited design in the death

of Christ has been the subject of much controversy-what great truth

revealed in Scripture has not? Nor do we forget that anything which has

to do with the Person and work of our blessed Lord requires to be

handled with the utmost reverence, and that a "Thus saith the Lord"

must be given in support of every assertion we make. Our appeal shall

be to the Law and to the Testimony.

For whom did Christ die? Who were the ones He intended to redeem by His

blood-shedding? Surely the Lord Jesus had some absolute determination

before Him when He went to the Cross. If He had, then it necessarily

follows that the extent of that purpose was limited, because an

absolute determination of purpose must be effected. If the absolute

determination of Christ included all mankind, then all mankind would

most certainly be saved. To escape this inevitable conclusion many have

affirmed that there was not such absolute determination before Christ,

that in His death a merely conditional provision of salvation has been

made for all mankind. The refutation of this assertion is found in the

promises made by the Father to His Son before He went to the Cross,

yea, before He became incarnate. The Old Testament Scriptures represent

the Father as promising the Son a certain reward for His sufferings on

behalf of sinners. At this stage we shall confine ourselves to one or

two statements recorded in the well known Fifty-third of Isaiah. There

we find God saying, "When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin,

He shall see His seed," that "He shall see of the travail of His soul,

and shall be satisfied," and that God's righteous Servant "should

justify many" (vv. 10 and 11). But here we would pause and ask, How

could it be certain that Christ should "see His seed," and "see of the

travail of His soul and be satisfied," unless the salvation of certain

members of the human race had been Divinely decreed, and therefore was

sure? How could it be certain that Christ should "justify many," if no

effectual provision was made that any should receive Him as their Lord

and Saviour? On the other hand, to insist that the Lord Jesus did

expressly purpose the salvation of all mankind is to charge Him with

that which no intelligent being should be guilty of, namely, to design

that which by virtue of His omniscience He knew would never come to

pass. Hence, the only alternative left us is that, so far as the

pre-determined purpose of His death is concerned Christ died for the

elect only. Summing up in a sentence, which we trust will be

intelligible to every reader, we would say, Christ died not merely to

make possible the salvation of all mankind, but to make certain the

salvation of all that the Father had given to Him. Christ died not

simply to render sins pardonable, but "to put away sin by the sacrifice

of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). As to whose "sin" (i.e., guilt, as in 1 John

1:7, etc.) has been "put away," Scripture leaves us in no doubt-it was

that of the elect, the "world" (John 1:29) of God's people!

(1) The limited design in the Atonement follows, necessarily, from the

eternal choice of the Father of certain ones unto salvation. The

Scriptures inform us that before the Lord became incarnate He said,

"Lo, I come, to do Thy will O God" (Heb. 10:7), and after He had become

incarnate He declared, "For I came down from Heaven, not to do Mine own

will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38). If then God had

from the beginning chosen certain ones to salvation, then, because the

will of Christ was in perfect accord with the will of the Father, He

would not seek to enlarge upon His election. What we have just said is

not merely a plausible deduction of our own, but is in strict harmony

with the express teaching of the Word. Again and again our Lord

referred to those whom the Father had "given" Him, and concerning whom

He was particularly exercised. Said He, "All that the Father giveth Me

shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast

out... And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all

which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up

again at the last day" (John 6:37, 39). And again, "These words spake

Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to Heaven, and said, Father, the hour is

come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee; As Thou hast

given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as

many as Thou hast given Him...I have manifested Thy name unto the men

which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest

them Me; and they have kept Thy Word... I pray for them: I pray not for

the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine...

Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me

where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me:

for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:1, 2,

6, 9, 24). Before the foundation of the world the Father predestinated

a people to be conformed to the image of His Son, and the death and

resurrection of the Lord Jesus was in order to the carrying out of the

Divine purpose.

(2) The very nature of the Atonement evidences that, in its application

to sinners, it was limited in the purpose of God. The Atonement of

Christ may be considered from two chief viewpoints-Godward and manward.

Godward, the Cross-work of Christ was a propitiation, an appeasing of

Divine wrath, a satisfaction rendered to Divine justice and holiness;

manward, it was a substitution, the Innocent taking the place of the

guilty, the Just dying for the unjust. But a strict substitution of a

Person for persons, and the infliction upon Him of voluntary

sufferings, involve the definite recognition on the part of the

Substitute and of the One He is to propitiate of the persons for whom

He acts, whose sins He bears, whose legal obligations He discharges.

Furthermore, if the Lawgiver accepts the satisfaction which is made by

the Substitute, then those for whom the Substitute acts, whose place He

takes, must necessarily be acquitted. If I am in debt and unable to

discharge it and another comes forward and pays my creditor in full and

receives a receipt in acknowledgement, then, in the sight of the law,

my creditor no longer has any claim upon me. On the Cross the Lord

Jesus gave Himself a ransom, and that it was accepted by God was

attested by the open grave three days later; the question we would here

raise is, For whom was this ransom offered? If it was offered for all

mankind then the debt incurred by every man has been cancelled. If

Christ bore in His own body on the tree the sins of all men without

exception, then none will perish. If Christ was "made a curse" for all

of Adam's race then none are now "under condemnation." "Payment God

cannot twice demand, first at my bleeding Surety's hand and then again

at mine." But Christ did not discharge the debts of all men without

exception, for some there are who will be '"cast into prison" (cf. 1

Peter 3:19 where the same Greek word for "prison" occurs), and they

shall "by no means come out thence, till they have paid the uttermost

farthing" (Matt. 5:26), which, of course, will never be. Christ did not

bear the sins of all mankind, for some there are who "die in their

sins" (John 8:21), and whose "sin remaineth" (John 9:41). Christ was

not "made a curse" for all of Adam's race, for some there are to whom

He will yet say, "Depart from Me ye cursed" (Matt. 25:41). To say that

Christ died for all alike, to say that He became the Substitute and

Surety of the whole human race, to say that He suffered on behalf of

and in the stead of all mankind, is to say that He "bore the curse for

many who are now bearing the curse for themselves; that He suffered

punishment for many who are now lifting up their own eyes in Hell,

being in torments; that He paid the redemption price for many who shall

yet pay in their own eternal anguish the wages of sin, which is death"

(George S. Bishop). But, on the other hand, to say as Scripture says,

that Christ was stricken for the transgressions of God's people, to say

that He gave His life "for the sheep," to say He gave His life a ransom

"for many," is to say that He made an atonement which fully atones; it

is to say He paid a price which actually ransoms; it is to say He was

set forth a propitiation which really propitiates; it is to say He is a

Saviour who truly saves.

(3) Closely connected with, and confirmatory of what we have said

above, is the teaching of Scripture concerning our Lord's priesthood.

It is as the great High Priest that Christ now makes intercession. But

for whom does He intercede? for the whole human race, or only for His

own people? The answer furnished by the New Testament to this question

is clear as a sunbeam. Our Saviour has entered into Heaven itself "now

to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24), that is, for

those who are "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). And again

it is written, "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost

that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession

for them" (Heb. 7:25). This is in strict accord with the Old Testament

type. After slaying the sacrificial animal, Aaron went into the holy of

holies as the representative and on behalf of the people of God: it was

the names of Israel's tribes which were engraven on his breastplate,

and it was in their interests he appeared before God. Agreeable to this

are our Lord's words in John 17:9-"I pray for them: I pray not for the

world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine."

Another Scripture which deserves careful attention in this connection

is found in Romans 8. In verse 33 the question is asked, "Who shall lay

anything to the charge of God's elect?" and then follows the inspired

answer-"It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is

Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the

right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Note

particularly that the death and intercession of Christ have one and the

same objects! As it was in the type so it is with the

antitype-expiation and supplication are co-extensive. If then Christ

intercedes for the elect only, and "not for the world," then He died

for them only. And observe further, that the death, resurrection,

exaltation and intercession of the Lord Jesus are here assigned as the

reason why none can lay any "charge" against God's elect. Let those who

would still take issue with what we are advancing weigh carefully the

following question-If the death of Christ extends equally to all, how

does it become security against a "charge," seeing that all who believe

not are "under condemnation"? (John 3:18).

(4) The number of those who share the benefits of Christ's death is

determined not only by the nature of the Atonement and the priesthood

of Christ but also by His power. Grant that the One who died upon the

Cross was God manifest in the flesh and it follows inevitably that what

Christ has purposed that will He perform; that what He has purchased

that will He possess; that what He has set His heart upon that will He

secure. If the Lord Jesus possesses all power in Heaven and earth then

none can successfully resist His will. But it may be said, This is true

in the abstract, nevertheless, Christ refuses to exercise this power,

inasmuch as He will never force anyone to receive Him as their Lord and

Saviour. In one sense that is true, but in another sense it is

positively untrue. The salvation of any sinner is a matter of Divine

power. By nature the sinner is at enmity with God, and naught but

Divine power operating within him can overcome this enmity; hence it is

written, "No man can come unto Me, except the Father which hath sent Me

draw him" (John 6:44). It is the Divine power overcoming the sinner's

innate enmity which makes him willing to come to Christ that he might

have life. But this "enmity" is not overcome in all-why? Is it because

the enmity is too strong to be overcome? Are there some hearts so

steeled against Him that Christ is unable to gain entrance? To answer

in the affirmative is to deny His omnipotence. In the final analysis it

is not a question of the sinner's willingness or unwillingness, for by

nature all are unwilling. Willingness to come to Christ is the finished

product of Divine power operating in the human heart and will in

overcoming man's inherent and chronic "enmity," as it is written, "Thy

people shall be willing in the day of Thy power" (Psa. 110:3). To say

that Christ is unable to win to Himself those who are unwilling is to

deny that all power in Heaven and earth is His. To say that Christ

cannot put forth His power without destroying man's responsibility is a

begging of the question here raised, for He has put forth His power and

made willing those who have come to Him, and if He did this without

destroying their responsibility, why "cannot" He do so with others? If

He is able to win the heart of one sinner to Himself why not that of

another? To say, as is usually said, the others will not let Him is to

impeach His sufficiency. It is a question of His will. If the Lord

Jesus has decreed, desired, purposed the salvation of all mankind, then

the entire human race will be saved, or, otherwise, He lacks the power

to make good His intentions; and in such a case it could never be said,

"He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." The issue

raised involves the deity of the Saviour, for a defeated Saviour cannot

be God.

Having reviewed some of the general principles which require us to

believe that the death of Christ was limited in its design, we turn now

to consider some of the explicit statements of Scripture which

expressly affirm it. In that wondrous and matchless Fifty-third of

Isaiah God tells us concerning His Son, "He was taken from prison and

from judgement: and who shall declare His generation? for He was cut

off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of My people

was He stricken" (v. 8). In perfect harmony with this was the word of

the angel to Joseph, "Thou shalt call His name JESUS, for He shall save

His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21) i.e., not merely Israel, but

all whom the Father had "given" Him. Our Lord Himself declared, "The

Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give

His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28), but why have said "for many"

if all without exception were included? It was "His people" whom He

"redeemed" (Luke 1:68). It was for "the sheep," and not the "goats,"

that the Good Shepherd gave His life (John 10:11). It was the "Church

of God" which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

If there is one Scripture more than any other upon which we should be

willing to rest our case it is John 11:49-52. Here we are told, "And

one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said

unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient

for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole

nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high

priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation;

And not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together

in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." Here we are

told that Caiaphas "prophesied not of himself," that is, like those

employed by God in Old Testament times (see 2 Peter 1:21), his prophecy

originated not with himself, but he spake as he was moved by the Holy

Spirit; thus is the value of his utterance carefully guarded, and the

Divine source of this revelation expressly vouched for. Here, too, we

are definitely informed that Christ died for "that nation," i.e.,

Israel, and also for the One Body, His Church, for it is into the

Church that the children of God-"scattered" among the nations-are now

being "gathered together in one." And is it not remarkable that the

members of the Church are here called "children of God" even before

Christ died, and therefore before He commenced to build His Church! The

vast majority of them had not then been born, yet they were regarded as

"children of God"; children of God because they had been chosen in

Christ before the foundation of the world, and therefore "predestinated

unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself" (Eph. 1:4,

5). In like manner, Christ said, "Other sheep I have (not "shall have")

which are not of this fold" (John 10:16).

If ever the real design of the Cross was uppermost in the heart and

speech of our blessed Saviour it was during the last week of His

earthly ministry. What then do the Scriptures which treat of this

portion of His ministry record in connection with our present inquiry?

They say, "When Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart

out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in

the world, He loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). They tell us how He

said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down His life

for His friends" (John 15:13). They record His word, "For their sakes I

sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth"

(John 17:19); which means, that for the sake of His own, those "given"

to Him by the Father, He separated Himself unto the death of the Cross.

One may well ask, Why such discrimination of terms if Christ died for

all men indiscriminately?

Ere closing this section of the chapter we shall consider briefly a few

of those passages which seem to teach most strongly an unlimited design

in the death of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 we read, "One died for

all." But that is not all this Scripture affirms. If the entire verse

and passage from which these words are quoted be carefully examined, it

will be found that instead of teaching an unlimited atonement, it

emphatically argues a limited design in the death of Christ. The whole

verse reads, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus

judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead." It should be

pointed out that in the Greek there is the definite article before the

last "all," and that the verb here is in the aorist tense, and

therefore should read, "We thus judge: that if One died for all, then

the all died." The Apostle is here drawing a conclusion as is clear

from the words "we thus judge, that if... then were." His meaning is,

that those for whom the One died are regarded, judicially, as having

died too. The next verse goes on to say, "And He died for all, that

they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto

Him which died for them, and rose again." The One not only died but

"rose again," and so, too, did the "all" for whom He died, for it is

here said they "live." Those for whom a substitute acts are legally

regarded as having acted themselves. In the sight of the law the

substitute and those whom he represents are one. So it is in the sight

of God. Christ was identified with His people and His people were

identified with Him, hence when He died they died (judicially) and when

He rose they rose also. But further we are told in this passage (v.

17), that if any man be in Christ he is a new creation; he has received

a new life in fact as well as in the sight of the law, hence the "all"

for whom Christ died are here bidden to live henceforth no more unto

themselves, "but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." In

other words, those who belonged to this "all" for whom Christ died, are

here exhorted to manifest practically in their daily lives what is true

of them judicially: they are to "live unto Christ who died for them."

Thus the "One died for all" is defined for us. The "all" for which

Christ died are they which "live," and which are here bidden to live

"unto Him." This passage then teaches three important truths, and the

better to show its scope we mention them in their inverse order:

certain ones are here bidden to live no more unto themselves but unto

Christ; the ones thus admonished are "they which live," that is live

spiritually, hence, the children of God, for they alone of mankind

possess spiritual life, all others being dead in trespasses and sins;

those who do thus live are the ones, the "all," the "them," for whom

Christ died and rose again. This passage therefore teaches that Christ

died for all His people, the elect, those given to Him by the Father;

that as the result of His death (and rising again "for them") they

"live"-and the elect are the only ones who do thus "live"; and this

life which is theirs through Christ must be lived "unto Him," Christ's

love must now "constrain" them.

"For there is one God, and one Mediator, between God and men (not

"man," for this would have been a generic term and signified mankind. O

the accuracy of Holy Writ!), the Man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a

ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:5, 6). It is

upon the words "who gave Himself a ransom for all" we would now

comment. In Scripture the word "all" (as applied to humankind) is used

in two senses-absolutely and relatively. In some passages it means all

without exception; in others it signifies all without distinction. As

to which of these meanings it bears in any particular passage, must be

determined by the context and decided by a comparison of parallel

Scriptures. That the word "all" is used in a relative and restricted

sense, and in such case means all without distinction and not all

without exception, is clear from a number of Scriptures, from which we

select two or three as samples. "And there went out unto him all the

land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptised of him in

the river of Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5). Does this mean

that every man, woman and child from "all the land of Judea and they of

Jerusalem" were baptised of John in Jordan? Surely not. Luke 7:30

distinctly says, "But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of

God against themselves, being not baptised of him." Then what does "all

baptised of him" mean? We answer it does not mean all without

exception, but all without distinction, that is, all classes and

conditions of men. The same explanation applies to Luke 3:21. Again we

read, "And early in the morning He came again into the Temple, and all

the people came unto Him; and He sat down, and taught them" (John 8:2);

are we to understand this expression absolutely or relatively? Does

"all the people" mean all without exception or all without distinction,

that is, all classes and conditions of people? Manifestly the latter;

for the Temple was not able to accommodate everybody that was in

Jerusalem at this time, namely, the Feast of Tabernacles. Again, we

read in Acts 22:15, "For thou (Paul) shalt be His witness unto all men

of what thou hast seen and heard." Surely "all men" here does not mean

every member of the human race. Now we submit that the words "who gave

Himself a ransom for all" in 1 Timothy 2:6 mean all without

distinction, and not all without exception. He gave Himself a ransom

for men of all nationalities, of all generations, of all classes; in a

word, for all the elect, as we read in Revelation 5:9, "For Thou wast

slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred,

and tongue, and people, and nation." That this is not an arbitrary

definition of the "all" in our passage is clear from Matthew 20:28

where we read, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to

minister, and to give His life a ransom for many," which limitation

would be quite meaningless if He gave Himself a ransom for all without

exception. Furthermore, the qualifying words here, "to be testified in

due time" must be taken into consideration. If Christ gave Himself a

ransom for the whole human race, in what sense will this be "testified

in due time"? seeing that multitudes of men will certainly be eternally

lost. But if our text means that Christ gave Himself a ransom for God's

elect, for all without distinction, without distinction of nationality,

social prestige, moral character, age or sex, then the meaning of these

qualifying words is quite intelligible, for in "due time" this will be

"testified" in the actual and accomplished salvation of every one of

them.

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the

suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace

of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). This passage need

not detain us long. A false doctrine has been erected here on a false

translation. There is no word whatever in the Greek corresponding to

"man" in our English version. In the Greek it is left in the

abstract-"He tasted death for every." The Revised Version has correctly

omitted "man" from the text, but has wrongly inserted it in italics.

Others suppose the word "thing" should be supplied-"He tasted death for

every thing"-but this, too, we deem a mistake. It seems to us that the

words which immediately follow explain our text: "For it became Him,

for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many

sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through

sufferings." It is of "sons" the Apostle is here writing, and we

suggest an ellipsis of "son"-thus: "He tasted death for every"-and

supply son in italics. Thus instead of teaching the unlimited design of

Christ's death, Hebrews 2:9, 10 is in perfect accord with the other

Scriptures we have quoted which set for the restricted purpose in the

Atonement: it was for the "sons" and not the human race our Lord

"tasted death." [7]

In closing this section of the chapter let us say that the only

limitation in the Atonement we have contended for arises from pure

Sovereignty; it is a limitation not of value and virtue, but of design

and application. We turn now to consider -

3. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SALVATION.

Since the Holy Spirit is one of the three Persons in the blessed

Trinity, it necessarily follows that He is in full sympathy with the

will and design of the other Persons of the Godhead. The eternal

purpose of the Father in election, the limited design in the death of

the Son, and the restricted scope of the Holy Spirit's operations are

in perfect accord. If the Father chose certain ones before the

foundation of the world and gave them to His Son, and if it was for

them that Christ gave Himself a ransom, then the Holy Spirit is not now

working to "bring the world to Christ." The mission of the Holy Spirit

in the world today is to apply the benefits of Christ's redemptive

sacrifice. The question which is now to engage us is not the extent of

the Holy Spirit's power-on that point there can he no doubt, it is

infinite-but what we shall seek to show is that His power and

operations are directed by Divine wisdom and Sovereignty.

We have just said that the power and operations of the Holy Spirit are

directed by Divine wisdom and indisputable Sovereignty. In proof of

this assertion we appeal first to our Lord's words to Nicodemus in John

3: 8- "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound

thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so

is every one that is born of the Spirit." A comparison is here drawn

between the wind and the Spirit. The comparison is a double one: first,

both are Sovereign in their actions, and second, both are mysterious in

their operations. The comparison is pointed out in the word "so." The

first point of analogy is seen in the words, "where it listeth" or

"pleaseth"; the second is found in the words "canst not tell." With the

second point of analogy we are not now concerned, but upon the first we

would comment further.

"The wind bloweth where it pleaseth... so is every one that is born of

the Spirit."The wind is an element which man can neither harness nor

hinder. The wind neither consults man's pleasure nor can it be

regulated by his devices. So it is with the Spirit. The wind blows when

it pleases, where it pleases, as it pleases. So it is with the Spirit.

The wind is regulated by Divine wisdom, yet, so far as man is

concerned, it is absolutely Sovereign in its operations. So it is with

the Spirit. Sometimes the wind blows so softly it scarcely rustles a

leaf; at other times it blows so loudly that its roar can be heard for

miles. So it is in the matter of the new birth; with some the Holy

Spirit deals so gently that His work is imperceptible to human

onlookers; with others His action is so powerful, radical,

revolutionary, that His operations are patent to many. Sometimes the

wind is purely local in its reach, at other times widespread in its

scope. So it is with the Spirit: today He acts on one or two souls,

tomorrow He may, as at Pentecost, "prick in the heart" a whole

multitude. But whether He works on few or many He consults not man. He

acts as He pleases. The new birth is due to the Sovereign will of the

Spirit

Each of the three Persons in the blessed Trinity is concerned with our

salvation: with the Father it is predestination; with the Son

propitiation; with the Spirit regeneration. The Father chose us; the

Son died for us; the Spirit quickens us. The Father was concerned about

us; the Son shed His blood for us, the Spirit performs His work within

us. What the One did was eternal, what the Other did was external, what

the Spirit does is internal. It is with the work of the Spirit we are

now concerned, with His work in the new birth, and particularly His

Sovereign operations in the new birth. The Father purposed our new

birth; the Son has made possible (by His "travail") the new birth; but

it is the Spirit who effects the new birth-"Born of the Spirit" (John

3:6).

The new birth is solely the work of God the Spirit and man has no part

or lot in it. This from the very nature of the case. Birth altogether

excludes the idea of any effort or work on the part of the one who is

born. Personally we have no more to do with our spiritual birth than we

had with our natural birth. The new birth is a spiritual resurrection,

a "passing from death unto life" (John 5:24) and, clearly, resurrection

is altogether outside of man's province. No corpse can re-animate

itself. Hence it is written, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the

flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). But the Spirit does not "quicken"

everybody-why? The usual answer returned to this question is, Because

everybody does not trust in Christ. It is supposed that the Holy Spirit

quickens only those who believe. But this is to put the cart before the

horse. Faith is not the cause of the new birth, but the consequence of

it. This ought not to need arguing. Faith (in God) is an exotic,

something that is not native to the human heart. If faith were a

natural product of the human heart, the exercise of a principle common

to human nature, it would never have been written, "All men have not

faith" (2 Thess. 3:2). Faith is a spiritual grace, the fruit of the

spiritual nature, and because the unregenerate are spiritually

dead-"dead in trespasses and sins"-then it follows that faith from them

is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe anything. "So then they

that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8)-but they could if

it were possible for the flesh to believe. Compare with this

last-quoted Scripture Hebrews 11:6-"But without faith it is impossible

to please Him." Can God be "pleased" or satisfied with any thing which

does not have its origin in Himself?

That the work of the Holy Spirit precedes our believing is

unequivocally established by 2 Thessalonians 2:13-"God hath from the

beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit

and belief of the truth." Note that "sanctification of the Spirit"

comes before and makes possible "belief of the truth." What then is the

"sanctification of the Spirit?" We answer, the new birth. In Scripture

"sanctification" always means "separation," separation for something

and unto something or someone. Let us now amplify our assertion that

the "sanctification of the Spirit" corresponds to the new birth and

points to the positional effect of it.

Here is a servant of God who preaches the Gospel to a congregation in

which are an hundred unsaved people. He brings before them the teaching

of Scripture concerning their ruined and lost condition: he speaks of

God, His character and righteous demands; he tells of Christ meeting

God's demands, and dying the Just for the unjust, and declares that

through "this Man" is now preached the forgiveness of sins; he closes

by urging the lost to believe what God has said in His Word and receive

His Son as their Lord and Saviour. The meeting is over; the

congregation disperses; ninety-nine of the unsaved have refused to come

to Christ that they might have life, and go out into the night having

no hope, and without God in the world. But the hundredth heard the Word

of life; the Seed sown fell into ground which had been prepared by God;

he believed the Good News, and goes home rejoicing that his name is

written in Heaven. He has been "born again," and just as a newly-born

babe in the natural world begins life by clinging instinctively, in its

helplessness, to its mother, so this new-born soul has clung to Christ.

Just as we read, "The Lord opened" the heart of Lydia "that she

attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14), so in

the case supposed above, the Holy Spirit quickened that one before he

believed the Gospel message. Here then is the "sanctification of the

Spirit": this one soul who has been born again has, by virtue of his

new birth, been separated from the other ninety-nine. Those born again

are, by the Spirit, set apart from those who are dead in trespasses and

sins.

A beautiful type of the operations of the Holy Spirit antecedent to the

sinner's "belief of the truth," is found in the first chapter of

Genesis. We read in verse 2, "And the earth was without form, and void;

and darkness was upon the face of the deep." The original Hebrew here

might be literally rendered thus: "And the earth had become a desolate

ruin, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." In "the beginning"

the earth was not created in the condition described in verse 2.

Between the first two verses of Genesis 1 some awful catastrophe had

occurred-possibly the fall of Satan--and, as the consequence, the earth

had been blasted and blighted, and had become a "desolate ruin," lying

beneath a pall of "darkness." Such also is the history of man. Today,

man is not in the condition in which he left the hands of his Creator:

an awful catastrophe has happened, and now man is a "desolate ruin" and

in total "darkness" concerning spiritual things. Next we read in

Genesis 1 how God refashioned the ruined earth and created new beings

to inhabit it. First we read, "And the Spirit of God moved upon the

face of the water." Next we are told, "And God said, Let there be

light; and there was light." The order is the same in the new creation:

there is the first the action of the Spirit, and then the Word of God

giving light. Before the Word found entrance into the scene of

desolation and darkness, bringing with it the light, the Spirit of God

"moved." So it is in the new creation. "The entrance of Thy word giveth

light" (Psa. 119:130), but before it can enter the darkened human heart

the Spirit of God must operate upon it. [8]

To return to 2 Thessalonians 2:13: "But we are bound to give thanks

always 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." The order of thought here is most

important and instructive. First, God's eternal choice; second, the

sanctification of the Spirit; third, belief of the truth. Precisely the

same order is found in 1 Peter 1:2-"Elect according to the

foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit,

unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." We take it

that the "obedience" here is the "obedience to the faith" (Rom. 1:5),

which appropriates the virtues of the sprinkled blood of the Lord

Jesus. So then before the "obedience" (of faith, cf. Heb. 5:9), there

is the work of the Spirit setting us apart, and behind that is the

election of God the Father. The ones "sanctified of the Spirit" then,

are they whom "God hath from the beginning chosen to salvation" (2

Thess. 2:13), those who are "elect according to the foreknowledge of

God the Father" (1 Peter 1:2).

But, it may be said, is not the present mission of the Holy Spirit to

"convict the world of sin"? And we answer, it is not. The mission of

the Spirit is threefold; to glorify Christ, to vivify the elect, to

edify the saints. John 16:8-11 does not describe the "mission" of the

Spirit, but sets forth the significance of His presence here in the

world. It treats not of His subjective work in sinners, showing them

their need of Christ, by searching their consciences and striking

terror to their hearts; what we have there is entirely objective. To

illustrate. Suppose I saw a man hanging on the gallows, of what would

that "convince" me? Why, that he was a murderer. How would I thus be

convinced? By reading the record of his trial? by hearing a confession

from his own lips? No; but by the fact that he was hanging there. So

the fact that the Holy Spirit is here furnishes proof of the world's

guilt, of God's righteousness, and of the Devil's judgement.

The Holy Spirit ought not to be here at all. That is a startling

statement, but we make it deliberately. Christ is the One who ought to

be here. He was sent here by the Father, but the world did not want

Him, would not have Him, hated Him, and cast Him out. And the presence

of the Spirit here instead evidences its guilt. The coming of the

Spirit was a proof to demonstration of the resurrection, ascension, and

glory of the Lord Jesus. His presence on earth reverses the world's

verdict, showing that God has set aside the blasphemous judgement in

the palace of Israel's high priest and in the hall of the Roman

governor. The "reproof" of the Spirit abides, and abides altogether

irrespective of the world's reception or rejection of His testimony.

Had our Lord been referring here to the gracious work which the Spirit

would perform in those who should be brought to feel their need of Him,

He had said that the Spirit would convict men of their unrighteousness,

their lack of righteousness. But this is not the thought here at all.

The descent of the Spirit from Heaven establishes God's righteousness,

Christ's righteousness. The proof of that is, Christ has gone to the

Father. Had Christ been an Impostor, as the religious world insisted

when they cast Him out, the Father had not received Him. The fact that

the Father did exalt Him to His own right hand, demonstrates that He

was innocent of the charges laid against Him; and the proof that the

Father has received Him, is the presence now of the Holy Spirit on

earth, for Christ has sent Him from the Father (John 16:7)! The world

was unrighteous in casting Him out, the Father righteous in glorifying

Him; and this is what the Spirit's presence here establishes.

"Of judgement, because the Prince of this world is judged" (v. 11).

This is the logical and inevitable climax. The world is brought in

guilty for their rejection of, for their refusal to receive, Christ.

Its condemnation is exhibited by the Father's exaltation of the spurned

One. Therefore nothing awaits the world, and its Prince, but judgement.

The "judgement" of Satan is already established by the Spirit's

presence here, for Christ, through death, set at nought him who had the

power of death, that is, the Devil (Heb. 2:14). When God's time comes

for the Spirit to depart from the earth then His sentence will be

executed, both on the world and its Prince. In the light of this

unspeakably solemn passage we need not be surprised to find Christ

saying, "The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it

seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." No, the world wants Him not; He

condemns the world.

"And when He is come, He will reprove (or, better, "convict"-bring in

guilty) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement: Of

sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to

My Father, and ye see Me no more; Of judgement, because the prince of

this world is judged" (John 16:8-11). Three things, then, the presence

of the Holy Spirit on earth demonstrates to the world: first, its sin,

because the world refused to believe on Christ; second, God's

righteousness in exalting to His own right hand the One cast out, and

now no more seen by the world; third, judgement, because Satan the

world's prince is already judged, though execution of his judgement is

yet future. Thus the Holy Spirit's presence here displays things as

they really are. We repeat, John 16:8-11 makes no reference to the

mission of the Spirit of God in the world, for during this

dispensation, the Spirit has no mission and ministry worldward.

The Holy Spirit is Sovereign in His operations and His mission is

confined to God's elect: they are the ones He "comforts," "seals,"

guides into all truth, shows things to come, etc. The work of the

Spirit is necessary in order to the complete accomplishment of the

Father's eternal purpose. Speaking hypothetically, but reverently, be

it said, that if God had done nothing more than given Christ to die for

sinners, not a single sinner would ever have been saved. In order for

any sinner to see his need of a Saviour and be willing to receive the

Saviour he needs the work of the Holy Spirit upon and within him as

imperatively required. Had God done nothing more than given Christ to

die for sinners and then sent forth His servants to proclaim salvation

through Jesus Christ, thus leaving sinners entirely to themselves to

accept or reject as they pleased, then every sinner would have

rejected, because at heart every man hates God and is at enmity with

Him. Therefore the work of the Holy Spirit was needed to bring the

sinner to Christ, to overcome his innate opposition, and compel him to

accept the provision God has made. We say "compel" the sinner, for this

is precisely what the Holy Spirit does, has to do, and this leads us to

consider at some length, though as briefly as possible, the parable of

the "Marriage Supper."

In Luke 14:16 we read, "A certain man made a great supper, and bade

many." By comparing carefully what follows here with Matthew 22:2-10

several important distinctions will be observed. We take it that these

passages are two independent accounts of the same parable, differing in

detail according to the distinctive purpose and design of the Holy

Spirit in each Gospel. Matthew's account-in harmony with the Spirit's

presentation there of Christ as the King says, "A certain king made a

marriage for his son." Luke's account-where the Spirit presents Christ

as the Son of Man-says "A certain man made a great supper and bade

many." Matthew 22:3 says, "And sent forth His servants"; Luke 14:17

says, "And sent His servant." Now what we wish particularly to call

attention to is, that all through Matthew's account it is "servants,"

whereas in Luke it is always "servant." The class of readers for whom

we are writing are those that believe, unreservedly, in the verbal

inspiration of the Scriptures, and such will readily acknowledge there

must be some reason for this change from the plural number in Matthew

to the singular number in Luke. We believe the reason is a weighty one

and that attention to this variation reveals an important truth. We

believe that the "servants" in Matthew, speaking generally, are all who

go forth preaching the Gospel, but that the "Servant" in Luke 14 is the

Holy Spirit, for God the Son, in the days of His earthly ministry, was

the Servant of Jehovah (Isa. 42:1). It will be observed that in Matthew

22 the "servants" are sent forth to do three things: first, to "call"

to the wedding (v. 3); second, to "tell those which are bidden.. all

things are ready: come unto the marriage" (v. 4); third, to "bid to the

marriage" (v. 9); and these three are the things which those who

minister the Gospel today are now doing. In Luke 14 the Servant is also

sent forth to do three things: first, He is to say to them that were

bidden, Come: for all things are now ready" (v. 17); second, He is to

"bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" (v.

21); third, He is to "compel them to come in" (v. 23), and the last two

of these the Holy Spirit alone can do!

In the above Scripture we see that "the Servant," the Holy Spirit,

compels certain ones to come in to the "supper" and herein is seen His

Sovereignty, His omnipotency, His Divine sufficiency. The clear

implication from this word "compel" is, that those whom the Holy Spirit

does "bring in" are not willing of themselves to come. This is exactly

what we have sought to show in previous paragraphs. By nature, God's

elect are children of wrath even as others (Eph. 2:3), and as such

their hearts are at enmity with God. But this "enmity" of theirs is

overcome by the Spirit and He "compels" them to come in. Is it not

clear then that the reason why others are left outside, is not only

because they are unwilling to go in, but also because the Holy Spirit

does not "compel" them to come in? Is it not manifest that the Holy

Spirit is Sovereign in the exercise of His power, that as the wind

"bloweth where it pleaseth" sothe Holy Spirit operates where He

pleases?

And now to sum up. We have sought to show the perfect consistency of

God's ways: that each Person in the Godhead acts in sympathy and

harmony with the Others. God the Father elected certain ones to

salvation, God the Son died for the elect, and God the Spirit quickens

the elect. Well may we sing,

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,

Praise Him all creatures here below,

Praise Him above ye heavenly host,

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

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[7] 1 John 2:2 will be examined in detail in Appendix 4.

[8] The priority contended for above is rather in order of nature than

of time, just as the effect must ever be preceded by the cause. A blind

man must have his eyes opened before he can see, and yet there is no

interval of time between the one and the other. As soon as his eyes are

opened, he sees. So a man must be born again before he can "see the

kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Seeing the Son is necessary to believing in

Him. Unbelief is attributed to spiritual blindness-those who believed

not the "report" of the Gospel "saw no beauty" in Christ that they

should desire Him. The work of the Spirit in "quickening" the one dead

in sins, precedes faith in Christ, just as cause ever precedes effect.

But no sooner is the heart turned toward Christ by the Spirit, than the

Saviour is embraced by the sinner.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN REPROBATION

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God"

(Rom. 11:22).

In the last chapter when treating of the Sovereignty of God the Father

in Salvation, we examined seven passages which represent Him as making

a choice from among the children of men, and predestinating certain

ones to be conformed to the image of His Son. The thoughtful reader

will naturally ask, And what of those who were not "ordained to eternal

life?" The answer which is usually returned to this question, even by

those who profess to believe what the Scriptures teach concerning God's

Sovereignty, is, that God passes by the non-elect, leaves them alone to

go their own way, and in the end casts them into the Lake of Fire

because they refused His way, and rejected the Saviour of His

providing. But this is only a part of the truth; the other part-that

which is most offensive to the carnal mind-is either ignored or denied.

In view of the awful solemnity of the subject here before us, in view

of the fact that today almost all-even those who profess to be

Calvinists-reject and repudiate this doctrine, and in view of the fact

that this is one of the points in our book which is likely to raise the

most controversy, we feel that an extended inquiry into this aspect of

God's Truth is demanded. That this branch of the subject of God's

Sovereignty is profoundly mysterious we freely allow, yet, that is no

reason why we should reject it. The trouble is that, nowadays, there

are so many who receive the testimony of God only so far as they can

satisfactorily account for all the reasons and grounds of His conduct,

which means they will accept nothing but that which can be measured in

the petty scales of their own limited capacities.

Stating it in its baldest form the point now to be considered is, Has

God foreordained certain ones to damnation? That many will be eternally

damned is clear from Scripture, that each one will be judged according

to his works and reap as he has sown, and that in consequence his

"damnation is just" (Rom. 3:8), is equally sure, and that God decreed

that the non-elect should choose the course they follow we now

undertake to prove.

From what has been before us in the previous chapter concerning the

election of some to salvation, it would unavoidably follow, even if

Scripture had been silent upon it, that there must be a rejection of

others. Every choice evidently and necessarily implies a refusal, for

where there is no leaving out there can be no choice. If there be some

whom God has elected unto salvation (2 Thess. 2:13), there must be

others who are not elected unto salvation. If there are some that the

Father gave to Christ (John 6:37), there must be others whom He did not

give unto Christ. If there be some whose names are written in the

Lamb's Book of Life (Rev. 21:27), there must be others whose names are

not written there. That this is the case we shall fully prove below.

Now all will acknowledge that from the foundation of the world God

certainly foreknew and foresaw who would and who would not receive

Christ as their Saviour, therefore in giving being and birth to those

He knew would reject Christ, He necessarily created them unto

damnation. All that can be said in reply to this is, No, while God did

foreknow these would reject Christ, yet He did not decree that they

should. But this is a begging of the real question at issue. God had a

definite reason why He created men, a specific purpose why He created

this and that individual, and in view of the eternal destination of His

creatures, He purposed either that this one should spend eternity in

Heaven or that this one should spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. If

then He foresaw that in creating a certain person that that person

would despise and reject the Saviour, yet knowing this beforehand He,

nevertheless, brought that person into existence, then it is clear He

designed and ordained that that person should be eternally lost. Again;

faith is God's gift, and the purpose to give it only to some, involves

the purpose not to give it to others. Without faith there is no

salvation--"He that believeth not shall be damned"-hence if there were

some of Adam's descendants to whom He purposed not to give faith, it

must be because He ordained that they should be damned.

Not only is there no escape from these conclusions, but history

confirms them. Before the Divine Incarnation, for almost two thousand

years, the vast majority of mankind were left destitute of even the

external means of grace, being favoured with no preaching of God's Word

and with no written revelation of His will. For many long centuries

Israel was the only nation to whom the Deity vouchsafed any special

discovery of Himself- "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk

in their own ways" (Acts 14:16)--"You only (Israel) have I known of all

the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). Consequently, as all other

nations were deprived of the preaching of God's Word, they were

strangers to the faith that cometh thereby (Rom. 10:17). These nations

were not only ignorant of God Himself, but of the way to please Him, of

the true manner of acceptance with Him, and the means of arriving at

the everlasting enjoyment of Himself.

Now if God had willed their salvation, would He not have vouchsafed

them the means of salvation? Would He not have given them all things

necessary to that end? But it is an undeniable matter of fact that He

did not. If, then, Deity can, consistently, with His justice, mercy,

and benevolence, deny to some the means of grace, and shut them up in

gross darkness and unbelief (because of the sins of their forefathers,

generations before), why should it be deemed incompatible with His

perfections to exclude some persons, many, from grace itself, and from

that eternal life which is connected with it? seeing that He is Lord

and Sovereign Disposer both of the end to which the means lead, and the

means which lead to that end?

Coming down to our own day, and to those in our own country-leaving out

the almost innumerable crowds of unevangelised heathen-is it not

evident that there are many living in lands where the Gospel is

preached, lands which are full of churches, who die strangers to God

and His holiness? True, the means of grace were close to their hand,

but many of them knew it not. Thousands are born into homes where they

are taught from infancy to regard all Christians as hypocrites and

preachers as arch-humbugs. Others, are instructed from the cradle in

Roman Catholicism, and are trained to regard Evangelical Christianity

as deadly heresy, and the Bible as a book highly dangerous for them to

read. Others, reared in "Christian Science" families, know no more of

the true Gospel of Christ than do the unevangelised heathen. The great

majority of these die in utter ignorance of the Way of Peace. Now are

we not obliged to conclude that it was not God's will to communicate

grace to them? Had His will been otherwise, would He not have actually

communicated His grace to them? If, then, it was the will of God, in

time, to refuse to them his grace, it must have been His will from all

eternity, since His will is, as Himself, the same yesterday, and today

and forever. Let it not be forgotten that God's providences are but the

manifestations of His decrees: what God does in time is only what He

purposed in eternity-His own will being the alone cause of all His acts

and works. Therefore from His actually leaving some men in final

impenitency and unbelief we assuredly gather it was His everlasting

determination so to do; and consequently that He reprobated some from

before the foundation of the world.

In the Westminster Confession it is said, "God from all eternity did by

the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably

foreordain whatsoever comes to pass." The late Mr. F. W. Grant-a most

careful and cautious student and writer-commenting on these words said:

"It is perfectly, divinely true, that God hath ordained for His own

glory whatsoever comes to pass." Now if these statements are true, is

not the doctrine of Reprobation established by them? What, in human

history, is the one thing which does come to pass every day? What, but

that men and women die, pass out of this world into a hopeless

eternity, an eternity of suffering and woe. If then God has

foreordained whatsoever comes to pass then He must have decreed that

vast numbers of human beings should pass out of this world unsaved to

suffer eternally in the Lake of Fire. Admitting the general premise, is

not the specific conclusion inevitable?

In reply to the preceding paragraphs the reader may say, All this is

simply reasoning, logical no doubt, but yet mere inferences. Very well,

we will now point out that in addition to the above conclusions there

are many passages in Holy Writ which are most clear and definite in

their teaching on this solemn subject; passages which are too plain to

be misunderstood and too strong to be evaded. The marvel is that so

many good men have denied their undeniable affirmations.

"Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city

that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the

inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. For it was of the

LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in

battle, that He might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no

favour, but that He might destroy them as the LORD commanded Moses"

(Josh. 11:18-20). What could be plainer than this? Here was a large

number of Canaanites whose hearts the Lord hardened, whom He had

purposed to utterly destroy, to whom He showed "no favour." Granted

that they were wicked, immoral, idolatrous; were they any worse than

the immoral, idolatrous cannibals of the South Sea Islands (and many

other places), to whom God gave the Gospel through John G. Paton!

Assuredly not. Then why did not Jehovah command Israel to teach the

Canaanites His laws and instruct them concerning sacrifices to the true

God? Plainly, because He had marked them out for destruction, and if

so, that from all eternity.

"The LORD hath made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for

the day of evil" (Prov. 16:4). That the Lord made all, perhaps every

reader of this book will allow: that He made all for Himself is not so

widely believed. That God made us, not for our own sakes, but for

Himself; not for our own happiness, but for His glory, is,

nevertheless, repeatedly affirmed in Scripture-Revelation 4:11. But

Proverbs 16:4 goes even farther: it expressly declares that the Lord

made the wicked for the Day of Evil: that was His design in giving them

being. But why? Does not Romans 9:17 tell us, "For the Scripture saith

unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I

might shew My power in thee, and that My name might be declared

throughout all the earth"! God has made the wicked that, at the end, He

may demonstrate His power"-demonstrate it by showing what an easy

matter it is for Him to subdue the stoutest rebel and to overthrow His

mightiest enemy.

"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me,

ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:23). In the previous chapter it has

been shown that the words "know" and "foreknowledge" when applied to

God in the Scriptures, have reference not simply to His prescience

(i.e., His bare knowledge beforehand), but to His knowledge of

approbation. When God said to Israel, "You only have I known of all the

families of the earth" (Amos 3:2), it is evident that He meant, "You

only had I any favourable regard to." When we read in Romans 11:2 "God

hath not cast away His people (Israel) which He foreknew," it is

obvious that what was signified is, "God has not finally rejected that

people whom He has chosen as the objects of His love"-cf. Deuteronomy

7:8. In the same way (and it is the only possible way) are we to

understand Matthew 7:23. In the Day of Judgement the Lord will say unto

many, "I never knew you." Note, it is more than simply "I know you

not." His solemn declaration will be, "I never knew you"-you were never

the objects of My approbation. Contrast this with "I know (love) My

sheep, and am known (loved) of Mine" (John 10:14). The "sheep," His

elect, the "few" He does "know"; but the reprobate, the non-elect, the

"many" He knows not-no, not even before the foundation of the world did

He know them-He "NEVER" knew them!

In Romans 9 the doctrine of God's Sovereignty in its application to

both the elect and the reprobate is treated of at length. A detailed

exposition of this important chapter would be beyond our present scope;

all that we can essay is to dwell upon the part of it which most

clearly bears upon the aspect of the subject which we are now

considering.

Verse 17. "For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same

purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and

that My name might be declared throughout all the earth." These words

refer us back to verses 13 and 14. In verse 13 God's love to Jacob and

His hatred to Esau are declared. In verse 14 it is asked "Is there

unrighteousness with God?" and here in verse 17 the Apostle continues

his reply to the objection. We cannot do better now than quote from

Calvin's comments upon this verse. "There are here two things to be

considered-the predestination of Pharaoh to ruin, which is to be

referred to the past and yet the hidden counsel of God-and then, the

design of this, which was to make known the name of God. As many

interpreters, striving to modify this passage, pervert it, we must

observe, that for the word 'I have raised thee up,' or stirred up, in

the Hebrew is, 'I have appointed,' by which it appears, that God,

designing to show that the contumacy of Pharaoh would not prevent Him

to deliver His people, not only affirms that his fury had been foreseen

by Him, and that He had prepared means for restraining it, but that He

had also thus designedly ordained it and indeed for this end,-that He

might exhibit a more illustrious evidence of His own power." It will be

observed that Calvin gives as the force of the Hebrew word which Paul

renders "For this cause have I raised thee up,"-"I have appointed." As

this is the word on which the doctrine and argument of the verse turns

we would further point out that in making this quotation from Exodus

9:16 the Apostle significantly departs from the Septuagint-the version

then in common use, and from which he most frequently quotes-and

substitutes a clause for the first that is given by the Septuagint:

instead of "On this account thou hast been preserved," he gives "For

this very end have I raised thee up!"

But we must now consider in more detail the case of Pharaoh which sums

up in concrete example the great controversy between man and his Maker.

"For now I will stretch out My hand, that I may smite thee and thy

people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And

in every deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee

My power; and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth"

(Exo. 9:15, 16). Upon these words we offer the following comments:

First, we know from Exodus 14 and 15 that Pharaoh was "cut off," that

he was cut off by God, that he was cut off in the very midst of his

wickedness, that he was cut off not by sickness nor by the infirmities

which are incident to old age, nor by what men term an accident, but

cut off by the immediate hand of God in judgement.

Second, it is clear that God raised up Pharaoh for this very end-to

"cut him off," which in the language of the New Testament means

"destroyed." God never does anything without a previous design. In

giving him being, in preserving him through infancy and childhood, in

raising him to the throne of Egypt, God had one end in view. That such

was God's purpose is clear from His words to Moses before he went down

to Egypt to demand of Pharaoh that Jehovah's people should be allowed

to go a three days' journey into the wilderness to worship Him-"And the

Lord said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that

thou do all these wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine

hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go"

(Exo. 4:21). But not only so, God's design and purpose was declared

long before this. Four hundred years previously God had said to

Abraham, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land

that is not theirs, and shall serve them: and they shall afflict them

four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I

judge" (Gen. 15:13, 14). From these words it is evident (a nation and

its king being looked at as one in the Old Testament) that God's

purpose was formed long before He gave Pharaoh being.

Third, an examination of God's dealings with Pharaoh makes it clear

that Egypt's king was indeed a "vessel of wrath fitted to destruction."

Placed on Egypt's throne, with the reins of government in his hands, he

sat as head of the nation which occupied the first rank among the

peoples of the world. There was no other monarch on earth able to

control or dictate to Pharaoh. To such a dizzy height did God raise

this reprobate, and such a course was a natural and necessary step to

prepare him for his final fate, for it is a Divine axiom that "pride

goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Further-and this is deeply important to note and highly significant-God

removed from Pharaoh the one outward restraint which was calculated to

act as a check upon him. The bestowing upon Pharaoh of the unlimited

powers of a king was setting him above all legal influence and control.

But besides this, God removed Moses from his presence and kingdom. Had

Moses, who not only was skilled in all the wisdom of the Egyptians but

also had been reared in Pharaoh's household, been suffered to remain in

close proximity to the throne, there can be no doubt but that his

example and influence had been a powerful check upon the king's

wickedness and tyranny. This, though not the only cause, was plainly

one reason why God sent Moses into Midian, for it was during his

absence that Egypt's inhuman king framed his most cruel edicts. God

designed, by removing this restraint, to give Pharaoh full opportunity

to fill up the full measure of his sins, and ripen himself for his

fully-deserved but predestined ruin.

Fourth, God "hardened" his heart as He declared He would (Exo. 4:21).

This is in full accord with the declarations of Holy Scripture-"The

preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from

the LORD" (Prov. 16:1); "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD,

as the rivers of water, He turneth it withersoever He will" (Prov.

21:1). Like all other kings, Pharaoh's heart was in the hand of the

Lord; and God had both the right and the power to turn it whithersoever

He pleased. And it pleased Him to turn it against all good. God

determined to hinder Pharaoh from granting his request through Moses to

let Israel go until He had fully prepared him for his final overthrow,

and because nothing short of this would fully fit him, God hardened his

heart.

Finally, it is worthy of careful consideration to note how the

vindication of God in His dealings with Pharaoh has been fully

attested. Most remarkable it is to discover that we havePharaoh's own

testimony in favour of God and against himself! In Exodus 9:15 and 16

we learn how God had told Pharaoh for what purpose He had raised him

up, and in verse 27 of the same chapter we are told that Pharaoh said,

"I have sinned this time: the LORD is righteous, and I and my people

are wicked." Mark that this was said by Pharaoh after he knew that God

had raised him up in order to "cut him off," after his severe

judgements had been sent upon him, after he had hardened his own heart.

By this time Pharaoh was fairly ripened for judgement, and fully

prepared to decide whether God had injured him, or whether he had

sought to injure God; and he fully acknowledged that he had "sinned"

and that God was "righteous." Again; we have the witness of Moses who

was fully acquainted with God's conduct toward Pharaoh. He had heard at

the beginning what was God's design in connection with Pharaoh; he had

witnessed God's dealings with him; he had observed his

"long-sufferance" toward this vessel of wrath fitted to destruction;

and at last he had beheld him cut off in Divine judgement at the Red

Sea. How then was Moses impressed? Does he raise the cry of injustice?

Does he dare to charge God with unrighteousness? Far from it. Instead,

he says, "Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like

Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!" (Exo.

15: 11).

Was Moses moved by a vindictive spirit as he saw Israel's archenemy

"cut off" by the waters of the Red Sea? Surely not. But to remove

forever all doubt upon this score it remains to be pointed out how that

saints in Heaven, after they have witnessed the sore judgements of God,

join in singing "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of

the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God

Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints" (Rev. 15:3).

Here then is the climax, and the full and final vindication of God's

dealings with Pharaoh. Saints in Heaven join in singing the Song of

Moses, in which the servant of God celebrated Jehovah's praise in

overthrowing Pharaoh and his hosts, declaring that in so acting God was

not unrighteous but just and true. We must believe, therefore, that the

Judge of all the earth did right in creating and destroying this vessel

of wrath, Pharaoh.

The case of Pharaoh establishes the principle and illustrates the

doctrine of Reprobation. If God actually reprobated Pharaoh, we may

justly conclude that He reprobates all others whom He did not

predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son. This inference

the Apostle Paul manifestly draws from the fate of Pharaoh, for in

Romans 9, after referring to God's purpose in raising up Pharaoh, he

continues, "therefore." The case of Pharaoh is introduced to prove the

doctrine of Reprobation as the counterpart of the doctrine of Election.

In conclusion, we would say that in forming Pharaoh God displayed

neither justice nor injustice, but only His bare Sovereignty. As the

potter is Sovereign in forming vessels, so God is Sovereign in forming

moral agents.

Verse 18. "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom

He will He hardeneth." The "therefore" announces the general conclusion

which the Apostle draws from all he had said in the three preceding

verses in denying that God was unrighteous in loving Jacob and hating

Esau, and specifically it applies the principle exemplified in God's

dealings with Pharaoh. It traces everything back to the Sovereign will

of the Creator. He loves one and hates another. He exercises mercy

toward some and hardens others, without reference to anything save His

own Sovereign will.

That which is most repulsive to the carnal mind in the above verse is

the reference to hardening-"Whom He will He hardeneth"-and it is just

here that so many commentators and expositors have adulterated the

truth. The most common view is that the Apostle is speaking of nothing

more than judicial hardening, i.e., a forsaking by God because these

subjects of His displeasure had first rejected His truth and forsaken

Him. Those who contend for this interpretation appeal to such

Scriptures as Romans 1: 19-26-"God gave them up," that is (see context)

those who "knew God" yet glorified Him not as God (v. 21). Appeal is

also made to 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. But it is to be noted that the

word "harden" does not occur in either of these passages. But further.

We submit that Romans 9:18 has no reference whatever to judicial

"hardening." The Apostle is not there speaking of those who had already

turned their back on God's truth, but instead, he is dealing with God's

Sovereignty, God's Sovereignty as seen not only in showing mercy to

whom He wills, but also in hardening whom He pleases. The exact words

are "Whom He will"-not, "all who have rejected His truth"-"He

hardeneth," and this, coming immediately after the mention of Pharaoh,

clearly fixes their meaning. The case of Pharaoh is plain enough,

though man by his glosses has done his best to hide the truth.

Verse 18. "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom

He will He hardeneth." This affirmation of God's Sovereign "hardening"

of sinners' hearts-in contradistinction from judicial hardening-is not

alone. Mark the language of John 12:37-40, "But though He had done so

many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him: that the

saying of Esaias (Isaiah) the prophet might be fulfilled, which he

spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of

the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe (why?),

because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and

hardened their hearts (why? Because they had refused to believe on

Christ? This is the popular belief, but mark the answer of Scripture)

that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their

heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." Now, reader, it is

just a question as to whether or not you will believe what God has

revealed in His Word. It is not a matter of prolonged searching or

profound study, but a childlike spirit which is needed in order to

understand this doctrine.

Verse 19. "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For

who hath resisted His will?" Is not this the very objection which is

urged today? The force of the Apostle's questions here seem to be this:

Since everything is dependent on God's will, which is irreversible, and

since this will of God, according to which He can do everything as

Sovereign-since He can have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy, and

can refuse mercy and inflict punishment on whom He chooses to do so-why

does He not will to have mercy on all, so as to make them obedient, and

thus put finding of fault out of court? Now it should be particularly

noted that the Apostle does not repudiate the ground on which the

objection rests. He does not say God does not find fault. Nor does he

say, Men may resist His will. Furthermore; he does not explain away the

objection by saying: You have altogether misapprehended my meaning when

I said 'Whom He will He treats kindly, and whom He wills He treats

severely.' But he says, "first, this is an objection you have no right

to make; and then, This is an objection you have no reason to make"

(vide Dr. Brown). The objection was utterly inadmissible, for it was a

replying against God. It was to complain about, argue against, what God

had done!

Verse 19. "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For

who hath resisted His will?" The language which the Apostle here puts

into the mouth of the objector is so plain and pointed, that

misunderstanding ought to be impossible. Why doth He yet find fault?

Now, reader, what can these words mean? Formulate your own reply before

considering ours. Can the force of the Apostle's question be any other

than this: If it is true that God has "mercy" on whom He wills, and

also "hardens" whom He wills, then what becomes of human

responsibility? In such a case men are nothing better than puppets, and

if this be true then it would be unjust for God to "find fault" with

His helpless creatures. Mark the word "then"-Thou wilt say then unto

me-he states the (false) inference or conclusion which the objector

draws from what the Apostle had been saying. And mark, my reader, the

Apostle readily saw the doctrine he had formulated would raise this

very objection, and unless what we have written throughout this book

provokes, in some at least, (all whose carnal minds are not subdued by

Divine grace) the same objection, then it must be either because we

have not presented the doctrine which is set forth in Romans 9, or else

because human nature has changed since the Apostle's day. Consider now

the remainder of the verse (19). The Apostle repeats the same objection

in a slightly different form-repeats it so that this meaning may not be

misunderstood-namely, "For who hath resisted His will?" It is clear

then that the subject under immediate discussion relates to God's

"will," i.e., His Sovereign ways, which confirms what we have said

above upon verses 17 and 18 where we contended that it is not judicial

hardening which is in view (that is, hardening because of previous

rejection of the truth), but Sovereign "hardening," that is, the

"hardening" of a fallen and sinful creature for no other reason than

that which inheres in the Sovereign will of God. And hence the

question, "Who hath resisted His will?" What then does the Apostle say

inreply to these objections?

Verse 20. "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?

Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me

thus?" The Apostle, then, did not say the objection was pointless and

groundless, instead, he rebukes the objector for his impiety. He

reminds him that he is merely a "man," a creature, and that as such it

is most unseemly and impertinent for him to "reply (argue, or reason)

against God." Furthermore, he reminds him that he is nothing more than

a "thing formed" and, therefore, it is madness and blasphemy to rise up

against the Former Himself. Ere leaving this verse it should be pointed

out that its closing words, "Why hast thou made me thus," help us to

determine, unmistakably, the precise subject under discussion. In the

light of the immediate context what can be the force of the "thus"?

What, but as in the case of Esau, why hast thou made me an object of

"hatred"? What, but as in the case of Pharaoh, Why hast thou made me

simply to "harden" me? What other meaning can, fairly, be assigned to

it?

It is highly important to keep clearly before us that the Apostle's

object throughout this passage is to treat of God's Sovereignty in

dealing with, on the one hand, those whom He loves-vessels unto honour

and vessels of mercy; and also, on the other hand, with those whom He

"hates" and "hardens"-vessels unto dishonour and vessels of wrath.

Verses 21-23. "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same

lump, to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What

if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endured

with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And

that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of

mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory." In these verses the

Apostle furnishes a full and final reply to the objections raised in

verse 19. First, he asks, "Hath not the potter power over the clay?"

etc. It is to be noted the word here translated "power" is a different

one in the Greek from the one rendered "power" in verse 22 where it can

only signify His might; but here in verse 21, the "power" spoken of

must refer to the Creator's rights or Sovereign prerogatives; that this

is so, appears from the fact that the same Greek word is employed in

John 1: 12-"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become

the sons of God"-which, as is well known, means the right or privilege

to become the sons of God. The R. V. employs "right" both in John 1:12

and Romans 9:21.

Verse 21. "Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to

make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" That the

"potter" here is God Himself is certain from the previous verse, where

the Apostle asks, "Who art thou that repliest against God?" and then,

speaking in the terms of the figure he was about to use, continues,

"Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it," etc. Some there are

who would rob these words of their force by arguing that while the

human potter makes certain vessels to be used for less honourable

purposes than others, nevertheless, they are designed to fill some

useful place. But the Apostle does not here say, Hath not the Potter

power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto an

honourable use and another to a less honourable use, but he speaks of

some "vessels" being made unto "dishonour." It is true, of course, that

God's wisdom will yet be fully vindicated, inasmuch as the destruction

of the reprobate will promote His glory-in what way the next verse

tells us.

Ere passing to the next verse let us summarise the teaching of this and

the two previous ones. In verse 19 two questions are asked, "Thou wilt

say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His

will?" To those questions a threefold answer is returned. First, in

verse 20 the Apostle denies the creature the right to sit in judgement

upon the ways of the Creator-"Nay but, O man who art thou that repliest

against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast

Thou made me thus?" The Apostle insists that the rectitude of God's

will must not be questioned. Whatever He does must be right. Second, in

verse 21 the Apostle declares that the Creator has the right to dispose

of His creatures as He sees fit-"Hath not the Potter power over the

clay, of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour, and another

unto dishonour?" It should be carefully noted that the word for "power"

here is exousia-an entirely different word from the one translated

"power" in the following verse ("to make known His power"), where it is

duaton. In the words "Hath not the Potter power over the clay?" it must

be God's power justly exercised which is in view-the exercise of God's

rights consistently with His justice-because the mere assertion of His

omnipotency would be no such answer as God would return to the

questions asked in verse 19. Third, in verses 22, 23 the Apostle gives

the reasons why God proceeds differently with one of His creatures from

another: on the one hand, it is to "shew His wrath" and to "make His

power known"; on the other hand, it is to "make known the riches of His

glory."

"Hath not the Potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one

vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" Certainly God has the

right to do this because He is the Creator. Does He exercise this

right? Yes, as verses 13 and 17 clearly show us-"For this same purpose

have I raised thee (Pharaoh) up."

Verse 22. "What if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His

power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath

fitted to destruction." Here the Apostle tells us in the second place

why God acts thus, i.e., differently with different ones-having mercy

on some and hardening others, making one vessel "unto honour" and

another "unto dishonour." Observe that here in verse 22 the Apostle

first mentions "vessels of wrath" before he refers in verse 23 to the

"vessels of mercy." Why is this? The answer to this question is of

first importance: we reply, Because it is the "vessels of wrath" who

are the subjects in view before the objector in verse 19. Two reasons

are given why God makes some "vessels unto dishonour"; first, to "shew

His wrath," and secondly "to make His power known"-both of which were

exemplified in the case of Pharaoh.

One point in the above verse requires separate consideration-"Vessels

of wrath fitted to destruction." The usual explanation which is given

of these words is that the vessels of wrath fit themselves to

destruction, that is, fit themselves by virtue of their wickedness; and

it is argued that there is no need for God to "fit them to

destruction," because they are already fitted by their own depravity,

and that this must be the real meaning of this expression. Now if by

"destruction" we understand punishment, it is perfectly true that the

non-elect do "fit themselves," for every one will be judged "according

to his works"; and further, we freely grant that subjectively the

non-elect do fit themselves for destruction. But the point to be

decided is, Is this what the Apostle is here referring to? And, without

hesitation, we reply it is not. Go back to verses 11-13: did Esau fit

himself to be an object of God's hatred, or was he not such before he

was born? Again; did Pharaoh fit himself for destruction, or did not

God harden his heart before the plagues were sent upon Egypt?-see

Exodus 4:21!

Romans 9:22 is clearly a continuation in thought of verse 21, and verse

21 is part of the Apostle's reply to the question raised in verse 20:

therefore, to fairly follow out the figure, it must be God Himself who

"fits" unto destruction the vessels of wrath. Should it be asked how

God does this, the answer, necessarily, is, objectively,-He fits the

non-elect unto destruction by His fore-ordinating decrees. Should it be

asked why God does this, the answer must be, To promote His own glory,

i.e., the glory of His justice, power and wrath. "The sum of the

Apostle's answer here is, that the grand object of God, both in the

election and the reprobation of men, is that which is paramount to all

things else in the creation of men, namely, His own glory" (Robert

Haldane).

Verse 23. "And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the

vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory." The only

point in this verse which demands attention is the fact that the

"vessels of mercy" are here said to be "afore prepared unto glory."

Many have pointed out that the previous verse does not say the vessels

of wrath were afore prepared unto destruction, and from this omission

they have concluded that we must understand the reference there to the

non-elect fitting themselves in time, rather than God ordaining them

for destruction from all eternity. But this conclusion by no means

follows. We need to look back to verse 21 and note the figure which is

there employed. "Clay" is inanimate matter, corrupt, decomposed, and

therefore a fit substance to represent fallen humanity. As then the

Apostle is contemplating God's Sovereign dealings with humanity in view

of the Fall, He does not say the vessels of wrath were "afore" prepared

unto destruction, for the obvious and sufficient reason that it was not

until after the Fall that they became (in themselves) what is here

symbolised by the "clay." All that is necessary to refute the erroneous

conclusion referred to above is to point out that what is said of the

vessels of wrath is not that they are fit for destruction (which is the

word that would have been used if the reference had been to them

fitting themselves by their own wickedness), but fitted to destruction;

which, in the light of the whole context, must mean a Sovereign

ordination to destruction by the Creator. We quote here the pointed

words of Calvin on this passage: "There are vessels prepared for

destruction, that is, given up and appointed to destruction; they are

also vessels of wrath, that is, made and formed for this end, that they

may be examples of God's vengeance and displeasure. Though in the

second clause the Apostle asserts more expressly, that it is God who

prepared the elect for glory, as he had simply said before that the

reprobate are vessels prepared for destruction, there is yet no doubt

but that the preparation of both is connected with the secret counsel

of God. Paul might have otherwise said, that the reprobate gave up or

cast themselves into destruction, but he intimates here, that before

they are born they are destined to their lot." With this we are in

hearty accord. Romans 9:22 does not say the vessels of wrath fitted

themselves, nor does it say they are fit for destruction, instead, it

declares they are "fitted to destruction," and the context shows

plainly it is God who thus "fits" them-objectively by His eternal

decrees.

Though Romans 9 contains the fullest setting forth of the doctrine of

Reprobation, there are still other passages which refer to it, one or

two more of which we will now briefly notice:

"What then? That which Israel seeketh for, that he obtained not, but

the election obtained it, and the rest were hardened" (Rom. 11:7 R.

V.). Here we have two distinct and clearly defined classes which are

set in sharp antithesis: the "election" and "the rest"; the one

"obtained," the other is "hardened." On this verse we quote from the

comments of John Bunyan of immortal memory: "These are solemn words:

they sever between men and men-the election and the rest, the chosen

and the left, the embraced and the refused. By 'rest' here must needs

be understood those not elect, because set the one in opposition to the

other, and if not elect, whom then but reprobate?"

Writing to the saints at Thessalonica the Apostle declared, "For God

hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord

Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9). Now surely it is patent to any impartial

mind that this statement is quite pointless if God has not "appointed"

any to wrath. To say that God "hath not appointed us to wrath" clearly

implies that there are some whom He has "appointed to wrath," and were

it not that the minds of so many professing Christians are so blinded

by prejudice, they could not fail to clearly see this.

"A Stone of stumbling, and a Rock of offence, even to them who stumble

at the Word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed" (1

Peter 2:8). The "whereunto" manifestly points back to the stumbling at

the Word, and their disobedience. Here, then, God expressly affirms

that there are some who have been "appointed" (it is the same Greek

word as in 1 Thess. 5:9) unto disobedience. Our business is not to

reason about it, but to bow to Holy Scripture. Our first duty is not to

understand, but to believe what God has said.

"But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed,

speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly

perish in their own corruption" (2 Peter 2:12). Here again every effort

is made to escape the plain teaching of this solemn passage. We are

told that it is the "brute beasts" who are "made to be taken and

destroyed," and not the persons here likened to them. All that is

needed to refute such sophistry is to inquire wherein lies the point of

analogy between the "these" (men) and the "brute beasts"? What is the

force of the "as"-but "these as brute beasts'? Clearly, it is that

"these" men as brute beasts, are the ones who, like animals, are "made

to be taken and destroyed": the closing words confirming this by

reiterating the same sentiment-"and shall utterly perish in their own

corruption."

"For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old

ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our

God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord

Jesus Christ" (Jude 4). Attempts have been made to escape the obvious

force of this verse by substituting a different translation. The R. V.

gives: "But there are certain men crept in privily, even they who were

of old written of beforehand unto this condemnation." But this altered

rendering by no means gets rid of that which is so distasteful to our

sensibilities. The question arises, Where were these "of old written of

beforehand"? Certainly not in the Old Testament, for nowhere is there

any reference there to wicked men creeping into Christian assemblies.

If "written of" be the best translation of "prographo," the reference

can only be to the book of the Divine decrees. So whichever alternative

be selected there can be no evading the fact that certain men are

"before of old" marked out by God "unto condemnation."

"And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, every one whose

name hath not been written from the foundation of the world in the Book

of Life of the Lamb that hath been slain" (Rev. 13:8, R. V. compare

Rev. 17:8). Here, then, is a positive statement affirming that there

are those whose names were not written in the Book of Life.

Here, then, are no less than ten passages which most plainly imply or

expressly teach the fact of reprobation. They affirm that the wicked

are made for the Day of Evil; that God fashions some vessels unto

dishonour; and by His eternal decree (objectively) fits them unto

destruction; that they are like brute beasts, made to be taken and

destroyed, being of old ordained unto this condemnation. Therefore in

the face of these Scriptures we unhesitatingly affirm (after nearly

twenty years careful and prayerful study of the subject) that the Word

of God unquestionably teaches both Predestination and Reprobation, or

to use the words of Calvin, "Eternal Election is God's predestination

of some to salvation, and others to destruction."

Having thus stated the doctrine of Reprobation, as it is presented in

Holy Writ, let us now mention one or two important considerations to

guard it against abuse and prevent the reader from making any

unwarranted deductions:

First, the doctrine of Reprobation does not mean that God purposed to

take innocent creatures, make them wicked, and then damn them.

Scripture says, "God hath made man upright: but they have sought out

many inventions" (Eccl. 7:29). God has not created sinful creatures in

order to destroy them, for God is not to be charged with the sin of His

creatures. The responsibility and criminality is man's.

God's decree of Reprobation contemplated Adam's race as fallen, sinful,

corrupt, guilty. From it God purposed to save a few as the monuments of

His Sovereign grace; the others He determined to destroy as the

exemplification of His justice and severity. In determining to destroy

these others, God did them no wrong. They had already fallen in Adam,

their legal representative; they are therefore born with a sinful

nature, and in their sins He leaves them. Nor can they complain. This

is as they wish; they have no desire for holiness; they love darkness

rather than light. Where, then, is there any injustice if God "gives

them up to their own heart's lusts" (Psa. 81:12).

Second, the doctrine of Reprobation does not mean that God refuses to

save those who earnestly seek salvation. The fact is that the reprobate

have no longing for the Saviour: they see in Him no beauty that they

should desire Him. They will not come to Christ-why then should God

force them to? He turns away none who do come-where then is the

injustice of God fore-determining their just doom? None will be

punished but for their iniquities; where then is the supposed

tyrannical cruelty of the Divine procedure? Remember that God is the

Creator of the wicked, not of their wickedness; He is the Author of

their being, but not the Infuser of their sin.

God does not (as we have been slanderously reported to affirm) compel

the wicked to sin, as the rider spurs on an unwilling horse. God only

says in effect that awful word, "Let them alone" (Matt. 15:14). He

needs only to slacken the reins of providential restraint, and withhold

the influence of saving grace, and apostate man will only too soon and

too surely, of his own accord, fall by his iniquities. Thus the decree

of reprobation neither interferes with the bent of man's own fallen

nature, nor serves to render him the less inexcusable.

Third, the decree of Reprobation in nowise conflicts with God's

goodness. Though the non-elect are not the objects of His goodness in

the same way or to the same extent as the elect are, yet are they not

wholly excluded from a participation of it. They enjoy the good things

of Providence (temporal blessings) in common with God's own children,

and very often to a higher degree. But how do they improve them? Does

the (temporal) goodness of God lead them to repent? Nay, verily, they

do but despise "His goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering," and

"after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself

wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom. 2:4, 5). On what righteous

ground, then, can they murmur against not being the objects of His

benevolence in the endless ages yet to come? Moreover, if it did not

clash with God's mercy and kindness to leave the entire body of the

fallen angels (2 Peter 2:4) under the guilt of their apostasy still

less can it clash with the Divine perfections to leave some of fallen

mankind in their sins and punish them for them.

Finally, let us interpose this necessary caution: It is utterly

impossible for any of us, during the present life, to ascertain who are

among the reprobate. We must not now so judge any man, no matter how

wicked he may be. The vilest sinner, may, for all we know, be included

in the election of grace and be one day quickened by the Spirit of

grace. Our marching orders are plain, and woe unto us if we disregard

them-"Preach the Gospel to every creature." When we have done so our

skirts are clear. If men refuse to heed, their blood is on their own

heads; nevertheless "we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them

that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are a savour of

death unto death; and to the other we are a savour of life unto life"

(2 Cor. 2:15, 16).

We must now consider a number of passages which are often quoted with

the purpose of showing that God has not fitted certain vessels to

destruction or ordained certain ones to condemnation. First, we cite

Ezekiel 18:31-"Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" On this passage we

cannot do better than quote from the comments of Augustus

Toplady:-"This is a passage very frequently, but very idly, insisted

upon by Arminians, as if it were a hammer which would at one stroke

crush the whole fabric to powder. But it so happens that the 'death'

here alluded to is neither spiritual nor eternal death: as is

abundantly evident from the whole tenor of the chapter. The death

intended by the prophet is a political death; a death of national

prosperity, tranquillity, and security. The sense of the question is

precisely this: What is it that makes you in love with captivity,

banishment, and civil ruin. Abstinence from the worship of images

might, as a people, exempt you from these calamities, and once more

render you a respectable nation. Are the miseries of public devastation

so alluring as to attract your determined pursuit? Why will ye die? die

as the house of Israel, and considered as a political body? Thus did

the prophet argue the case, at the same time adding-'For I have no

pleasure in the death of him that dieth saith the Lord God, wherefore,

turn yourselves, and live ye.' This imports: First, the national

captivity of the Jews added nothing to the happiness of God. Second, if

the Jews turned from idolatry, and flung away their images, they should

not die in a foreign, hostile country, but live peaceably in their own

land and enjoy their liberties as an independent people." To the above

we may add: political death must be what is in view in Ezekiel 18:31,

32 for the simple but sufficient reason that they were already

spiritually dead!

Matthew 25:41 is often quoted to show that God has not fitted certain

vessels to destruction- "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting

fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels." This is, in fact, one of

the principal verses relied upon to disprove the doctrine of

Reprobation. But we submit that the emphatic word here is not "for" but

"Devil." This verse (see context) sets forth the severity of the

judgement which awaits the lost. In other words, the above Scripture

expresses the awfulness of the everlasting fire rather than the

subjects of it-if the fire be "prepared for the Devil and his angels"

then how intolerable it will be! If the place of eternal torment into

which the damned shall be cast is the same as that in which God's

arch-enemy will suffer, how dreadful must that place be!

Again: if God has chosen only certain ones to salvation, why are we

told that God "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts

17:30)? That God commandeth "all men" to repent is but the enforcing of

His righteous claims as the moral Governor of the world. How could He

do less, seeing that all men everywhere have sinned against Him?

Furthermore, that God commandeth all men everywhere to repent argues

the universality of creature responsibility. But this Scripture does

not declare that it is God's pleasure to "give repentance" (Acts 5:31)

everywhere. That the Apostle Paul did not believe God gave repentance

to every soul is clear from his words in 2 Timothy 2:25--"In meekness

instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give

them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

Again, we are asked, if God has "ordained" only certain ones unto

eternal life then why do we read that He "will have all men to be

saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4)? The reply

is, that the words "all" and "all men," like the term "world," are

often used in a general and relative sense. Let the reader carefully

examine the following passages: Mark 1:5; John 6:45; 8:2; Acts 21:28;

22:15; 2 Corinthians 3:2, etc., and he will find full proof of our

assertion. 1 Timothy 2:4 cannot teach that God wills the salvation of

all mankind or otherwise all mankind would be saved-"What His soul

desireth even that He doeth" (Job 23:13)!

Again; we are asked, Does not Scripture declare, again and again, that

God is no "respecter of persons"? We answer, it certainly does, and

God's electing grace proves it. The seven sons of Jesse, though older

and physically superior to David, are passed by, while the young

shepherd-boy is exalted to Israel's throne. The scribes and lawyers

pass unnoticed, and ignorant fishermen are chosen to be the Apostles of

the Lamb. Divine truth is hidden from the wise and prudent and is

revealed to babes instead. The great majority of the wise and noble are

ignored, while the weak, the base, the despised, are called and saved.

Harlots and publicans are sweetly compelled to come in to the Gospel

feast while self-righteous Pharisees are suffered to perish in their

immaculate morality. Truly, God is "no respecter" of persons or He

would not have saved me.

That the Doctrine of Reprobation is a "hard saying" to the carnal mind

is readily acknowledged-yet, is it any "harder" than that of eternal

punishment? That it is clearly taught in Scripture we have sought to

demonstrate, and it is not for us to pick and choose from the truths

revealed in God's Word. Let those who are inclined to receive those

doctrines which commend themselves to their judgement, and who reject

those which they cannot fully understand, remember those scathing words

of our Lord's, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the

prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25): fools because slow of heart; slow

of heart, not dull of head!

Once more we would avail ourselves of the language of Calvin:

"But, as I have hitherto only recited such things as are delivered

without any obscurity or ambiguity in the Scriptures, let persons who

hesitate not to brand with ignominy those Oracles of Heaven, beware of

what kind of opposition they make. For, if they pretend ignorance, with

a desire to be commended for their modesty, what greater instance of

pride can be conceived, than to oppose one little word to the authority

of God! as, 'It appears otherwise to me,' or 'I would rather not meddle

with this subject.' But if they openly censure, what will they gain by

their puny attempts against Heaven? Their petulance, indeed, is no

novelty; for in all ages there have been impious and profane men, who

have virulently opposed this doctrine. But they shall feel the truth of

what the Spirit long ago declared by the mouth of David, that God 'is

clear when He judgest' (Psa. 51:4). David obliquely hints at the

madness of men who display such excessive presumption amidst their

insignificance, as not only to dispute against God, but to arrogate to

themselves the power of condemning Him. In the meantime, he briefly

suggests, that God is unaffected by all the blasphemies which they

discharge against Heaven, but that He dissipates the mists of calumny,

and illustriously displays His righteousness; our faith, also, being

founded on the Divine Word, and therefore, superior to all the world,

from its exaltation looks down with contempt upon those mists" (John

Calvin).

In closing this chapter we propose to quote from the writings of some

of the standard theologians since the days of the Reformation, not that

we would buttress our own statements by an appeal to human authority,

however venerable or ancient, but in order to show that what we have

advanced in these pages is no novelty of the twentieth century, no

heresy of the "latter days" but, instead, a doctrine which has been

definitely formulated and commonly taught by many of the most pious and

scholarly students of Holy Writ.

"Predestination we call the decree of God, by which He has determined

in Himself, what He would have to become of every individual of

mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny: but

eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for

others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of

these ends, we say, he is predestinated either to life or to

death"-from John Calvin's "Institutes" (1536 A. D.) Book III, Chapter

XXI entitled "Eternal Election, or God's Predestination of Some to

Salvation and of Others to Destruction."

We ask our readers to mark well the above language. A perusal of it

should show that what the present writer has advanced in this chapter

is not "hyper-Calvinism" but real Calvinism, pure and simple. Our

purpose in making this remark is to show that those who, not acquainted

with Calvin's writings, in their ignorance condemn as ultra-Calvinism

that which is simply a reiteration of what Calvin himself taught-a

reiteration because that prince of theologians as well as his humble

debtor have both found this doctrine in the Word of God itself.

Martin Luther in his most excellent work "De Servo Arbitrio" (Free Will

a Slave), wrote: "All things whatsoever arise from, and depend upon,

the Divine appointments, whereby it was preordained who should receive

the Word of Life, and who should disbelieve it, who should be delivered

from their sins, and who should be hardened in them, who should be

justified and who should be condemned. This is the very truth which

razes the doctrine of freewill from its foundations, to wit, that God's

eternal love of some men and hatred of others is immutable and cannot

be reversed."

John Fox, whose Book of Martyrs was once the best known work in the

English language (alas that is not so today, when Roman Catholicism is

sweeping upon us like a great destructive tidal wave!), wrote:

"Predestination is the eternal decreement of God, purposed before in

Himself, what should befall all men, either to salvation, or

damnation."

The "Larger Westminster Catechism" (1688)-adopted by the General

Assembly of the Presbyterian Church-declares, "God, by an eternal and

immutable decree, out of His mere love, for the praise of His glorious

grace, to be manifested in due time, hath elected some angels to glory,

and in Christ hath chosen some men to eternal life, and the means

thereof; and also, according to His own will (whereby He extendeth or

withholdeth favour as He pleases), hath passed by, and foreordained the

rest to dishonour and wrath, to be for their sin inflicted, to the

praise of the glory of His justice."

John Bunyan, author of "The Pilgrim's Progress," wrote a whole volume

on "Reprobation." From it we make one brief extract:

"Reprobation is before the person cometh into the world, or hath done

good or evil. This is evidenced by Romans 9:11. Here you find twain in

their mother's womb, and both receiving their destiny, not only before

they had-done good or evil, but before they were in a capacity to do

it, they being yet unborn-their destiny, I say, the one unto, the other

not unto the blessing of eternal life; the one elect, the other

reprobate; the one chosen, the other refused." In his "Sighs from

Hell," John Bunyan also wrote: "They that do continue to reject and

slight the Word of God are such, for the most part, as are ordained to

be damned."

Commenting upon Romans 9:22, "What is God willing to shew His wrath,

and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the

vessels of wrath fitted to destruction," Jonathan Edwards (Vol. 4, p.

306 - 1743 A.D.) says, "How awful doth the majesty of God appear in the

dreadfulness of His anger! This we may learn to be one end of the

damnation of the wicked."

Augustus Toplady, author of "Rock of Ages" and other sublime hymns,

wrote: "God, from all eternity decreed to leave some of Adam's fallen

posterity in their sins, and to exclude them from the participation of

Christ and His benefits." And again, "We, with the Scriptures, assert:

That there is apredestination of some particular persons to life, for

the praise of the glory of Divine grace; and also a predestination of

other particular persons to death for the glory of Divine justice-which

death of punishment they shall inevitably undergo, and that justly, on

account of their sins."

George Whitefield, that stalwart of the eighteenth century, used by God

in blessing to so many, wrote: "'Without doubt, the doctrine of

election and reprobation must stand or fall together... I frankly

acknowledge I believe the doctrine of Reprobation, that God intends to

give saving grace, through Jesus Christ, only to a certain number; and

that the rest of mankind, after the fall of Adam, being justly left to

God to continue in sin, will at last suffer that eternal death which is

its proper wages."

"Fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22). After declaring this phrase admits

of two interpretations, Dr. Hodge-perhaps the best known and most

widely read commentator on Romans-says, "The other interpretation

assumes that the reference is to God and that the Greek word for

'fitted' has its full participle force; prepared (by God) for

destruction." This, says Dr. Hodge, "Is adopted not only by the

majority of Augustinians, but also by many Lutherans."

Were it necessary we are prepared to give quotations from the writings

of Wycliffe, Huss, Ridley, Hooper, Cranmer, Ussher, John Trapp, Thomas

Goodwin, Thomas Manton (Chaplain to Cromwell), John Owen, Witsius, John

Gill (predecessor of Spurgeon), and a host of others. We mention this

simply to show that many of the most eminent saints in bye-gone days,

the men most widely used of God, held and taught this doctrine which is

so bitterly hated in these last days, when men will no longer "endure

sound doctrine"; hated by men of lofty pretensions, but who,

notwithstanding their boasted orthodoxy and much advertised piety, are

not worthy to unfasten the shoes of the faithful and fearless servants

of God of other days.

"O the depth of the riches both of wisdom and knowledge of God! how

unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out! For what

hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? or

who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him

again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom

be glory forever, Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36). [9]

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[9] "Of Him"-His will is the origin of all existence; "through" or "by

Him"-He is the Creator and Controller of all; "to Him"-all things

promote His glory in their final end.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN OPERATION

"For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be

the glory for ever. Amen"

(Romans 11:36).

Has God foreordained everything that comes to pass? Has He decreed that

what is, was to have been? In the final analysis this is only another

way of asking, Is God now governing the world and everyone and

everything in it? If God is governing the world then is He governing it

according to a definite purpose, or aimlessly and at random? If He is

governing it according to some purpose, then when was that purpose

made? Is God continually changing His purpose and making a new one

every day, or was His purpose formed from the beginning? Are God's

actions, like ours, regulated by the change of circumstances, or are

they the outcome of His eternal purpose? If God formed a purpose before

man was created then is that purpose going to be executed according to

His original designs and is He now working toward that end? What saith

the Scriptures? They declare God is One "who worketh all things after

the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

Few who read this book are likely to call into question the statement

that God knows and foreknows all things, but perhaps many would

hesitate to go further than this. Yet is it not self-evident that if

God foreknows all things, He has also foreordained all things? Is it

not clear that God foreknows what will be because He has decreed what

shall be? God's foreknowledge is not the cause of events, rather are

events the effects of His eternal purpose. when God has decreed a thing

shall be He knows it will! be. In the nature of things there cannot be

anything known as what shall be unless it is certain to be, and there

is nothing certain to be unless God has ordained it shall be. Take the

Crucifixion as an illustration. On this point the teaching of Scripture

is as clear as a sunbeam. Christ as the Lamb whose blood was to be shed

was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20).

Having then "ordained" the slaying of the Lamb, God knew He would be

"led to the slaughter," and therefore made it known accordingly through

Isaiah the prophet. The Lord Jesus was not "delivered" up by God

foreknowing it before it took place, but by His fixed counsel and

fore-ordination (Acts 2:23). Foreknowledge of future events then is

founded upon God's decrees, hence if God foreknows everything that is

to be, it is because He has determined in Himself from all eternity

everything which will be-"Known unto God are all His works from the

beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18), which shows that God has a plan,

that God did not begin His work at random or without a knowledge of how

His plan would succeed.

God created all things. This truth no one, who bows to the testimony of

Holy Writ, will question; nor would any such be prepared to argue that

the work of creation was an accidental work. God first formed the

purpose to create, and then put forth the creative act in fulfilment of

that purpose. All real Christians will readily adopt the words of the

Psalmist and say, "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast

Thou made them all." Will any who endorse what we have just said, deny

that God purposed to govern the world which He created? Surely the

creation of the world was not the end of God's purpose concerning it.

Surely He did not determine simply to create the world and place man in

it, and then leave both to their fortunes. It must be apparent that God

has some great end or ends in view worthy of His infinite perfections,

and that He is now governing the world so as to accomplish these

ends-"The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of His

heart to all generations" (Psa. 33:11).

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none

else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the

beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done,

saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa.

46:9, 10). Many other passages might be adduced to show that God has

many counsels concerning this world and concerning man, and that all

these counsels will most surely be realised. It is only when they are

thus regarded that we can intelligently appreciate the prophecies of

Scripture. In prophecy the mighty God has condescended to take us into

the secret chamber of His eternal counsels and make known to us what He

has purposed to do in the future. The hundreds of prophecies which are

found in the Old and New Testaments are not so much predictions of what

will come to pass, as they are revelations to us of what God has

purposed SHALL come to pass.

What then was the great purpose for which this world and the human race

were created? The answer of Scripture is, "The LORD hath made all

things for Himself" (Prov. 16:4). And again, "Thou hast created all

things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11).

The great end of creation was the manifestation of God's glory. "The

heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His

handiwork" (Psa. 19:1); but it was by man, originally made in His own

image and likeness, that God designed chiefly to manifest His glory.

But how was the great Creator to be glorified by man? Before his

creation, God foresaw the fall of Adam and the consequent ruin of his

race, therefore He could not have designed that man should glorify Him

by continuing in a state of innocency. Accordingly we are taught that

Christ was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" to be the

Saviour of fallen men. The redemption of sinners by Christ was no mere

after-thought of God: it was no expediency to meet an un-looked-for

calamity. No; it was a Divine provision, and therefore when man fell he

found mercy walking hand in hand with justice.

From all eternity God designed that our world should be the stage on

which He would display His manifold grace and wisdom in the redemption

of lost sinners: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and

powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold

wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in

Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11.) For the accomplishment of this

glorious design God has governed the world from the beginning, and will

continue it to the end. It has been well said, "We can never understand

the providence of God over our world, unless we regard it as a

complicated machine having ten thousand parts, directed in all its

operations to one glorious end-the display of the manifold wisdom of

God in the salvation of the Church," i.e., the "called out" ones.

Everything else down here is subordinated to this central purpose. It

was the apprehension of this basic truth that the Apostle, moved by the

Holy Spirit, was led to write, "Therefore I endure all things for the

elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in

Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). What we would now

contemplate is the operation of God's Sovereignty in the government of

this world.

In regard to the operation of God's government over the material world

little needs now be said. In previous chapters we have shown that

inanimate matter and all irrational creatures are absolutely subject to

their Creator's pleasure. While we freely admit that the material world

appears to be governed by laws that are stable and more or less uniform

in their operations, yet Scripture, history, and observation, compel us

to recognise the fact that God suspends these laws and acts apart from

them whenever it pleaseth Him to do so. In sending His blessings or

judgements upon His creatures He may cause the sun itself to stand

still, and the stars in their courses to fight for His people (Judges

5:20); He may send or withhold "the early and the latter rains"

according to the dictates of His own infinite wisdom; He may smite with

plague or bless with health; in short, being God, being absolute

Sovereign, He is bound and tied by no laws of Nature, but governs the

material world as seemeth Him best.

But what of God's government of the human family? What does Scripture

reveal in regard to the modus operandi of the operations of His

governmental administration over mankind? To what extent and by what

influence does God control the sons of men? We shall divide our answer

to this question into two parts and consider first God's method of

dealing with the righteous, His elect; and then His method of dealing

with the wicked.

GOD'S METHOD OF DEALING WITH THE RIGHTEOUS:

1. God exerts upon His own elect a quickening influence or power.

By nature they are spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins, and

their first need is spiritual life, for "Except a man be born again, he

cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). In the new birth God brings

us from death unto life (John 5:24). He imparts to us His own nature (2

Peter 1:4). He delivers us from the power of darkness and translates us

into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13). Now, manifestly, we could

not do this ourselves for we were "without strength" (Rom. 5:6), hence

it is written, "we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus" (Eph.

2:10).

In the new birth we are made partakers of the Divine nature: a

principle, a "seed," a life, is communicated to us which is "'born of

the Spirit," and therefore "is spirit"; is born of the Holy Spirit and

therefore is holy. Apart from this Divine and holy nature which is

imparted to us at the new birth it is utterly impossible for any man to

generate a spiritual impulse, form a spiritual concept, think a

spiritual thought, understand spiritual things, still less engage in

spiritual works. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," but the

natural man has no desire for holiness, and the provision that God has

made he does not want. Will then a man pray for, seek for, strive

after, that which he dislikes? Surely not. If then a man does "follow

after" that which by nature he cordially dislikes, if he does now love

the One he once hated, it is because a miraculous change has taken

place within him; a power outside of himself has operated upon him, a

nature entirely different from his old one has been imparted to him,

and hence it is written, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a

new creation: old things are passed away; behold all things are become

new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Such an one as we have just described has passed

from death unto life, has been turned from darkness to light, and from

the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26:18). In no other way can the great

change be accounted for.

The new birth is very, very much more than simply shedding a few tears

due to a temporary remorse over sin. It is far more than changing our

course of life, the leaving off of bad habits and the substituting of

good ones. It is something different from the mere cherishing and

practising of noble ideals. It goes infinitely deeper than coming

forward to take some popular evangelist by the hand, signing a

pledge-card, or "joining the church." The new birth is no mere turning

over a new leaf but is the inception and reception of a new life. It is

no mere reformation but a complete transformation. In short, the new

birth is a miracle, the result of the supernatural operation of God. It

is radical, revolutionary, lasting.

Here then is the first thing, in time, which God does in His own elect.

He lays hold of those who are spiritually dead and quickens them into

newness of life. He takes up one who was shapen in iniquity and

conceived in sin, and conforms him to the image of His Son. He seizes a

captive of the Devil and makes him a member of the household of faith.

He picks up a beggar and makes him joint-heir with Christ. He comes to

one who is full of enmity against Him and gives him a new heart that is

full of love for Him. He stoops to one who by nature is a rebel and

works in him both to will and to do of His own good pleasure. By His

irresistible power He transforms a sinner into a saint, an enemy into a

friend, a slave of the Devil into a child of God. Surely then we are

moved to say,

"When all Thy mercies O my God

My wondering soul surveys,

Transported with the view I'm lost

In wonder, love and praise."

2. God exerts upon His own elect an energising influence or power.

The Apostle prayed to God for the Ephesian saints that the eyes of

their understanding might be enlightened in order that, among other

things, they might know "what is the exceeding greatness of His power

to us-ward who believe" (Eph. 1:19), and that they might be

"strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (3:16). It is

thus that the children of God are enabled to fight the good fight of

faith and battle with the adverse forces which constantly war against

them. In themselves they have no strength: they are but "sheep," and

sheep are one of the most defenceless animals there is; but the promise

is sure-"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might

He increaseth strength" (Isa. 40:29).

It is this energising power that God exerts upon and within the

righteous which enables them to serve Him acceptably. Said the prophet

of old, "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord" (Micah

3:8). And said our Lord to His Apostles, "Ye shall receive power, after

that the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1:8), and thus it proved,

for of these same men we read subsequently, "And with great power gave

the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great

grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). So it was, too, with the Apostle

Paul, "and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing word of

man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor.

2:4). But the scope of this power is not confined to service, for we

read in 2 Peter 1:3, "According as His Divine power hath given unto us

all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge

of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue." Hence it is that the

various graces of the Christian character, "love, joy, peace,

long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," are

ascribed directly to God Himself, being denominated "the fruit of the

Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23). Compare Ephesians 5:9.

3. God exerts upon His own elect a directing influence or power.

Of old He led His people across the wilderness, directing their steps

by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night; and today He

still directs His saints, though now from within rather from without.

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even

unto death" (Psa. 48:14), but He "guides" us by working in us both to

will and to do His good pleasure. That He does so guide us is clear

from the words of the Apostle in Ephesians 2: 10-"For we are His

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath

before ordained that we should walk in them." Thus all ground for

boasting is removed and God gets all the glory, for with the prophet we

have to say, "LORD, Thou wilt ordain peace for us: for Thou also hast

wrought all our works in us" (Isa. 26:12). How true then that "A man's

heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps" (Prov.

16:29)! Compare Psalm 65:4; Ezekiel 36:27.

4. God exerts upon His own elect a preserving influence or power.

Many are the Scriptures which set forth this blessed truth. "He

preserveth the souls of His saints; He delivereth them out of the hand

of the wicked" (Psa. 97:10). "For the LORD loveth judgement, and

forsaketh not His saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of

the wicked shall be cut off" (Psa. 37:28). "The LORD preserveth all

them that love Him: but all the wicked will He destroy" (Psa. 145:20).

It is needless to multiply texts or to raise an argument at this point

respecting the believer's responsibility and faithfulness-we can no

more "persevere" without God preserving us than we can breathe when God

ceases to give us breath; we are "kept by the power of God through

faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter

1:5). Compare 1 Chronicles 18:6. It remains for us now to consider,

GOD'S METHOD OF DEALING WITH THE WICKED:

In contemplating God's governmental dealings with the non-elect we find

that He exerts upon them a fourfold influence or power. We adopt the

clear-cut divisions suggested by Dr. Rice:

1. God exerts upon the wicked a restraining influence by which they are

prevented from doing what they are naturally inclined to do.

A striking example of this is seen in Abimelech, king of Gerar. Abraham

came down to Gerar and fearful lest he might be slain on account of his

wife he instructed her to pose as his sister. Regarding her as an

unmarried woman, Abimelech sent and took Sarah unto himself; and then

we learn how God put forth His power to protect her honour-"And God

said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the

integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against

Me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her"(Gen. 20:6). Had not God

interposed, Abimelech would have grievously wronged Sarah, but the Lord

restrained him and allowed him not to carry out the intentions of his

heart.

A similar instance is found in connection with Joseph and his

brethren's treatment of him. Owing to Jacob's partiality for Joseph his

brethren "hated him," and when they thought they had him in their power

"they conspired against him to slay him" (Gen. 37:18). But God did not

allow them to carry out their evil designs. First He moved Reuben to

deliver him out of their hands, and next he caused Judah to suggest

that Joseph should be sold to the passing Ishmaelites, who carried him

down into Egypt. That it was God who thus restrained them is clear; he

made known himself to his brethren; said he, "So now it was not you

that sent me hither, but God" (Gen. 45:8)!

The restraining influence which God exerts upon the wicked was

strikingly exemplified in the person of Balaam, the prophet hired by

Balak to curse the Israelites. One cannot read the inspired narrative

without discovering that, left to himself, Balaam had readily and

certainly accepted the offer of Balak. How evidently God restrained the

impulses of his heart is seen from his own acknowledgement-"How shall I

curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD

hath not defied? Behold I have received commandment to bless: and He

hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it" (Num. 23:8, 20).

Not only does God exert a restraining influence upon wicked individuals

but He does so upon whole peoples as well. A remarkable illustration of

this is found in Exodus 34:24-"For I will cast out the nations before

thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land,

when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the

year." Three times every male Israelite, at the command of God, left

his home and inheritance and journeyed to Jerusalem to keep the Feasts

of the Lord; and in the above Scriptures we learn He promised them that

while they were at Jerusalem He would guard their unprotected homes by

restraining the covetous designs and desires of their heathen

neighbours.

2. God exerts upon the wicked a softening influence disposing them

contrary to their natural inclinations to do that which will promote

His cause.

Above, we referred to Joseph's history as an illustration of God

exerting a restraining influence upon the wicked, let us note now his

experiences in Egypt as exemplifying our assertion that God also exerts

a softening influence upon the unrighteous. We are told that while he

was in the house of Potiphar "The LORD was with Joseph, and his master

saw the LORD was with him," and in consequence, "Joseph found favour in

his sight and he made him overseer over his house" (Gen. 39:2, 3, 4).

Later, when Joseph was unjustly cast into prison, we are told "But the

LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favour in the

sight of the keeper of the prison" (Gen. 39:21), and in consequence the

prison-keeper showed him much kindness and honour. Finally, after his

release from prison, we learn from Acts 7:10 that the Lord "gave him

favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made

him governor over Egypt and all his house."

An equally striking evidence of God's power to melt the hearts of his

enemies, was seen in Pharaoh's daughter's treatment of the infant

Moses. The incident is well known. Pharaoh had issued an edict

commanding the destruction of every male child of the Israelites. A

certain Levite had a son born to him who for three months was kept

hidden by his mother. No longer able to conceal the infant Moses she

placed him in an ark of bulrushes and laid him by the river's brink.

The ark was discovered by none less than the king's daughter who had

come down to the river to bathe, but instead of heeding her father's

wicked decree and casting the child into the river we are told that

"she had compassion on him" (Exo. 2:6)! Accordingly, the young life was

spared and later Moses became the adopted son of this princess!

God has access to the hearts of all men and He softens or hardens them

according to His Sovereign purpose. The profane Esau swore vengeance

upon his brother for the deception which he had practised upon his

father, yet when next he met Jacob, instead of slaying him we are told

that Esau "fell on his neck and kissed him" (Gen. 33:4)! Ahab, the weak

and wicked consort of Jezebel, was highly enraged against Elijah the

prophet, at whose word the heavens had been shut up for three years and

a half: so angry was he against the one whom he regarded as his enemy

that we are told he searched for him in every nation and kingdom and

when he could not be found "he took an oath" (1 Kings 18:10). Yet, when

they met, instead of killing the prophet, Ahab meekly obeyed Elijah's

behest and "sent unto all the children of Israel and gathered the

prophets together unto Mount Carmel" (v. 20). Again; Esther the poor

Jewess is about to enter the presence-chamber of the august

Medo-Persian monarch which, said she, "is not according to the law"

(Esth. 4:16). She went in expecting to "perish," but we are told "She

obtained favour in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the

golden sceptre" (5:2). Yet again; the boy Daniel is a captive in a

foreign court. The king "appointed" a daily provision of meat and drink

for Daniel and his fellows. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he

would not defile himself with the allotted portion, and accordingly

made known his purpose to his master, the prince of the eunuchs. What

happened? His master was a heathen and "feared" the king. Did he turn

then upon Daniel and angrily demand that his orders be promptly carried

out? No; for we read, "Now God had brought Daniel into favour and

tender love with the prince of the eunuchs" (Dan. 1:9)!

"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water:

He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Prov. 21:1). A remarkable

illustration of this is seen in Cyrus, the heathen king of Persia.

God's people were in captivity, but the predicted end of their

captivity was almost reached. Meanwhile the Temple at Jerusalem lay in

ruins, and, as we have said, the Jews were in bondage in a distant

land. What hope was there then that the Lord's house would be re-built?

Mark now what God did, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia,

that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled,

the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a

proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it in writing, saying,

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of Heaven hath given me

all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him a

house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah" (Ezra 1:1, 2). Cyrus, be it

remembered, was a pagan, and as secular history bears witness, a very

wicked man, yet the Lord moved him to issue this edict that His Word

through Jeremiah seventy years before might be fulfilled. A similar and

further illustration is found in Ezra 7:27, where we find Ezra

returning thanks for what God had caused King Artaxerxes to do in

completing and beautifying the house which Cyrus had commanded to be

erected-"Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers which hath put such a

thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord

which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 7:27).

3. God exerts upon the wicked a directing influence so that good is

made to result from their intended evil.

Once more we revert to the history of Joseph as a case in point. In

selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites his brethren were actuated by cruel

and heartless motives. Their object was to make away with him, and the

passing of these travelling traders furnished an easy way out for them.

To them the act was nothing more than the enslaving of a noble youth

for the sake of gain. But now observe how God was secretly working and

over-ruling their wicked actions. Providence so ordered it that these

Ishmaelites passed by just in time to prevent Joseph being murdered,

for his brethren had already taken counsel together to put him to

death. Further; these Ishmaelites were journeying to Egypt, which was

the very country to which God had purposed to send Joseph, and He

ordained they should purchase Joseph just when they did. That the hand

of God was in this incident, that it was something more than a

fortunate coincidence, is clear from the words of Joseph to his

brethren at a later date, "God sent me before you to preserve you a

posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance"

(Gen. 45:7).

Another equally striking illustration of God directing the wicked is

found in Isaiah 10:5-7: "O Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger, and the

staff in their hand is Mine indignation. I will send him against an

hypocritical nation, and against the people of My wrath will I give him

a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them

down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither

doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off

nations not a few." Assyria's king had determined to be a

world-conqueror, to "cut off nations not a few." But God directed and

controlled his military lust and ambition, and caused him to confine

his attention to the conquering of the insignificant nation of Israel.

Such a task was not in the proud king's heart-"he meant it not so"-but

God gave him this charge and he could do nothing but fulfil it. Compare

also Judges 7:22.

The supreme example of the controlling, directing influence which God

exerts upon the wicked, is the Cross of Christ with all its attending

circumstances. If ever the superintending providence of God was

witnessed it was there. From all eternity God had predestined every

detail of that event of all events. Nothing was left to chance or the

caprice of man. God had decreed when and where and how His blessed Son

was to die. Much of what He had purposed concerning the Crucifixion had

been made known through the Old Testament prophets, and in the accurate

and literal fulfilment of these prophecies we have clear proof, full

demonstration, of the controlling and directing influence which God

exerts upon the wicked. Not a thing occurred except as God had

ordained, and all that He had ordained took place exactly as He

purposed. Had it been decreed (and made known in Scripture) that the

Saviour should be betrayed by one of His own disciples-by His "familiar

friend"-see Psalm 41:9 and compare Matthew 26:50-then the Apostle Judas

is the one who sold Him. Had it been decreed that the betrayer should

receive for his awful perfidy thirty pieces of silver, then are the

chief priests moved to offer him this very sum. Had it been decreed

that this betrayal sum should be put to a particular use, namely,

purchase of the potter's field, then the hand of God directs Judas to

return the money to the chief priests and so guided their "counsel"

(Matt. 27:7) that they did this very thing. Had it been decreed that

there should be those who bore "false witness" against our Lord (Psa.

35:11), then accordingly such were raised up. Had it been decreed that

the Lord of Glory should be spat upon and "scourged" (Isa. 50:6), then

there were not found wanting those who were vile enough to do so. Had

it been decreed that the Saviour should be "numbered with the

transgressors," then unknown to himself, Pilate, directed by God, gave

orders for His crucifixion along with two thieves. Had it been decreed

that vinegar and gall should be given Him to drink while He hung upon

the Cross, then this decree of God was executed to the very letter. Had

it been decreed that the heartless should gamble for His garments, then

sure enough they did this very thing. Had it been decreed that not a

bone of Him should be broken (Psa. 34:20), then the controlling hand of

God which suffered the Roman soldier to break the legs of the thieves,

prevented him from doing the same with our Lord. Ah! there were not

enough soldiers in all the Roman legions, there were not sufficient

demons in all the hierarchies of Satan, to break one bone in the body

of Christ. And why? Because the Almighty Sovereign had decreed that not

a bone should be broken. Do we need to extend this paragraph any

farther? Does not the accurate and literal fulfilment of all that

Scripture had predicted in connection with the Crucifixion, demonstrate

beyond all controversy that an Almighty power was directing and

superintending everything that was done on that Day of days?

4. God also hardens the hearts of wicked men and blinds their minds.

"God hardens men's hearts! God blinds men's minds!" Yes, so Scripture

represents Him. In developing this theme of the Sovereignty of God in

Operation we recognise that we have now reached its most solemn aspect

of all, and that here especially, we need to keep very close indeed to

the words of Holy Writ. God forbid that we should go one fraction

further than His Word goes; but may He give us grace to go as far as

His Word goes. It is true that secret things belong unto the Lord, but

it is also true that those things which are revealed in Scripture

belong unto us and to our children.

"He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal subtly with His

servants" (Psa. 105:25). The reference here is to the sojourn of the

descendants of Jacob in the land of Egypt when, after the death of the

Pharaoh who had welcomed the old patriarch and his family, there "arose

up a new king who knew not Joseph"; and in his days the children of

Israel had "increased greatly" so that they outnumbered the Egyptians;

then it was that God "turned their heart to hate His people."

The consequence of the Egyptians' "hatred" is well known: they brought

them into cruel bondage and placed them under merciless taskmasters

until their lot became unendurable. Helpless and wretched the

Israelites cried unto Jehovah, and in response He appointed Moses to be

their deliverer. God revealed Himself unto His chosen servant, gave him

a number of miraculous signs which he was to exhibit at the Egyptian

court, and then bade him to go to Pharaoh and demand that the

Israelites should be allowed to go to a three days' journey into the

wilderness, that they might worship the Lord. But before Moses started

out on his journey God warned him concerning Pharaoh, "I will harden

his heart that he shall not let the people go" (Exo. 4:21). If it be

asked, Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart? the answer furnished by

Scripture itself is, In order that God might show forth His power in

him (Rom. 9:17); in other words, it was so that the Lord might

demonstrate that it was just as easy for Him to overthrow this haughty

and powerful monarch as it was for Him to crush a worm. If it should be

pressed further, Why did God select such a method of displaying His

power? then the answer must be that being Sovereign God reserves to

Himself the right to act as He pleases.

Not only are we told that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that he

would not let the Israelites go, but after God had plagued his land so

severely that he reluctantly gave a qualified permission, and after

that the first-born of all the Egyptians had been slain, and Israel had

actually left the land of bondage, God told Moses, "And I, behold, I

will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them:

and I will get Me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his

chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am

the LORD, when I have gotten Me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots,

and upon his horsemen" (Exo. 14:17, 18).

The same thing happened subsequently in connection with Sihon, king of

Heshbon, through whose territory Israel had to pass on their way to the

promised land. When reviewing their history Moses told the people, "But

Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy

God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that He might

deliver him into thy hand" (Deut. 2:30)!

So it was also after that Israel had entered Canaan. We read, "There

was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the

Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. For

it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come

against Israel in battle, that He might destroy them, as the Lord

commanded Moses" (Josh. 11:19, 20). From other Scriptures we learn why

God purposed to "destroy utterly" the Canaanites-it was because of

their awful wickedness and corruption.

Nor is the revelation of this solemn truth confined to the Old

Testament. In John 12:37-40 we read, "But though He had done so many

miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him: that (in order

that) the saying of Esaias (Isaiah) the prophet might be fulfilled,

which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath

the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe,

because that Esaias said again, HE hath blinded their eyes, and

hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor

understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."

It needs to be carefully noted here that these whose eyes God "blinded"

and whose heart He "hardened" were men who had deliberately scorned the

Light and rejected the testimony of God's own Son.

Similarly we read in 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12, "And for this cause God

shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that

they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure

in unrighteousness." What God did unto the Jews of old He is yet going

to do unto Christendom. Just as the Jews of Christ's day despised His

testimony, and in consequence were "blinded," so a guilty Christendom

which has rejected the Truth shall yet have sent them from God a

"strong delusion" that they may believe a lie.

Is God really governing the world? Is He exercising rule over the human

family? What is the modus operandi of His governmental administration

over mankind? To what extent and by what means does He control the sons

of men? How does God exercise an influence upon the wicked, seeing

their hearts are at enmity against Him? These are some of the questions

we have sought to answer from Scripture in the previous sections of

this chapter. Upon His own elect God exerts a quickening, an

energising, a directing, and a preserving power. Upon the wicked God

exerts a restraining, softening, directing, and hardening and blinding

power, according to the dictates of His own infinite wisdom and unto

the outworking of His own eternal purpose. God's decrees are being

executed. What He has ordained is being accomplished. Man's wickedness

is bounded. The limits of evil-doing and of evildoers has been Divinely

defined and cannot be exceeded. Though many are in ignorance of it, all

men, good and bad, are under the jurisdiction of and are absolutely

subject to the administration of the Supreme Sovereign-"Alleluia: for

the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. 19:6)-reigneth over all.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND THE HUMAN WILL

"It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good

pleasure"

(Phil. 2: 13).

Concerning the nature and the power of fallen man's will, the greatest

confusion prevails today, and the most erroneous views are held, even

by many of God's children. The popular idea now prevailing, and which

is taught from the great majority of pulpits, is that man has a "free

will," and that salvation comes to the sinner through his will

co-operating with the Holy Spirit. To deny the "free will" of man,

i.e., his power to choose that which is good, his native ability to

accept Christ, is to bring one into disfavour at once, even before most

of those who profess to be orthodox. And yet Scripture emphatically

says, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of

God that showeth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). Which shall we believe: God, or

the preachers?

But some one may reply, Did not Joshua say to Israel, "Choose you this

day whom ye will serve"? Yes, he did; but why not complete his

sentence-"whether the gods which your fathers served which were on the

other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye

dwell" (Josh. 24:15)! But why attempt to pit Scripture against

Scripture? The Word of God never contradicts itself, and the Word

expressly declares, "There is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11).

Did not Christ say to the men of His day "Ye will not come to Me, that

ye might have life" (John 5:40)? Yes, but some did "come" to Him, some

did receive Him. True and who were they? John 1:12, 13 tells us: "But

as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of

God, to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood,

nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"!

But does not Scripture say, "Whosoever will may come"? It does, but

does this signify that everybody has the will to come? What of those

who won't come? "Whosoever will may come" no more implies that fallen

man has the power (in himself) to come, than "Stretch forth thine hand"

implied that the man with the withered arm had ability (in himself) to

comply. In and of himself the natural man has power to reject Christ;

but in and of himself he has not the power to receive Christ. And why?

Because he has a mind that is "enmity against" Him (Rom. 8:7); because

he has a heart that hates Him (John 15:18). Man chooses that which is

according to his nature, and therefore before he will ever choose or

prefer that which is Divine and spiritual a new nature must be imparted

to him; in other words, he must be born again.

Should it be asked, But does not the Holy Spirit overcome a man's

enmity and hatred when He convicts the sinner of his sins and his need

of Christ; and does not the Spirit of God produce such conviction in

many that perish? Such language betrays confusion of thought: were such

a man's enmity really "overcome," then he would readily turn to Christ;

that he does not come to the Saviour demonstrates that his enmity is

not overcome. But that many are, through the preaching of the Word,

convicted by the Holy Spirit, who nevertheless die in unbelief, is

solemnly true. Yet, it is a fact which must not be lost sight of that

the Holy Spirit does something more in each of God's elect than He does

in the non-elect: He works in them "both to will and to do of His good

pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

In reply to what we have said above, Arminians would answer, No; the

Spirit's work of conviction is the same both in the converted and in

unconverted, that which distinguishes the one class from the other is

that the former yielded to His strivings whereas the latter resist

them. But if this were the case then the Christian would have ground

for boasting and self-glorying over his co-operation with the Spirit;

but this would flatly contradict Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye

saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of

God."

Let us appeal to the actual experience of the Christian reader. Was

there not a time (may the remembrance of it bow each of us into the

dust) when you were unwilling to come to Christ? There was. Since then

you have come to Him. Are you now prepared to give Him all the glory

for that (Psa. 115:1)? Do you not acknowledge you came to Christ

because the Holy Spirit brought you from unwillingness to willingness?

You do. Then is it not also a patent fact that the Holy Spirit has not

done in many others what He has in you! Granting that many others have

heard the Gospel, been shown their need of Christ, yet, they are still

unwilling to come to Him. Thus He has wrought more in you than in them.

Do you answer, Yet I remember well the time when the Great Issue was

presented to me, and my consciousness testifies that my will acted and

that I yielded to the claims of Christ upon me. Quite true. But before

you "yielded" the Holy Spirit overcame the native enmity of your mind

against God, and this "enmity" He does not overcome in all. Should it

be said, That is because they are unwilling for their enmity to be

overcome. Ah! none are thus "'willing" till He has put forth His

all-mighty power and wrought a miracle of grace in the heart.

But let us now inquire, What is the human Will? Is it a

self-determining agent, or is it, in turn, determined by something

else? Is it Sovereign or servant? Is the will superior to every other

faculty of our being so that it governs them, or is it moved by their

impulses and subject to their pleasure? Does the will rule the mind, or

does the mind control the will? Is the will free to do as it pleases,

or is it under the necessity of rendering obedience to something

outside of itself? "Does the will stand apart from the other great

faculties or powers of the soul, a man within a man, who can reverse

the man and fly against the man and split him into segments, as a glass

snake breaks in pieces? Or, is the will connected with the other

faculties, as the tail of the serpent is with his body, and that again

with his head, so that where the head goes, the whole creature goes,

and, as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he? First thought, then

heart (desire or aversion), and then act. Is it this way, the dog wags

the tail? Or, is it the will, the tail, wags the dog? Is the will the

first and chief thing in man, or is it the last thing-to be kept

subordinate, and in its place beneath the other faculties? and, is the

true philosophy of moral action and its process that of Genesis 3:6:

'And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food'

(sense-perception, intelligence), 'and a tree to be desired'

(affections), 'she took and ate thereof' (the will)." (George S.

Bishop). These are questions of more than academical interest. They are

of practical importance. We believe that we do not go too far when we

affirm that the answer returned to these questions is a fundamental

test of doctrinal soundness. [10]

1. THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN WILL.

What is the Will? We answer, the will is the faculty of choice, the

immediate cause of all action. Choice necessarily implies the refusal

of one thing and the acceptance of another. The positive and the

negative must both be present to the mind before there can be any

choice. In every act of the will there is a preference-the desiring one

thing rather than another. Where there is no preference, but complete

indifference, there is no volition. To will is to choose, and to choose

is to decide between two or more alternatives. But there is something

which influences the choice; something which determines the decision.

Hence the will cannot be Sovereign because it is the servant of that

something. The will cannot be both Sovereign and servant. It cannot be

both cause and effect. The will is not causative, because, as we have

said, something causes it to choose, therefore that something must be

the causative agent. Choice itself is affected by certain

considerations, is determined by various influences brought to bear

upon the individual himself, hence, volition is the effect of these

considerations and influences, and if the effect, it must be their

servant; and if the will is their servant then it is not Sovereign, and

if the will is not Sovereign, we certainly cannot predicate absolute

"freedom" of it. Acts of the will cannot come to pass of themselves -

to say they can, is to postulate an uncaused effect. Ex nihilo nihil

fit-nothing cannot produce something.

In all ages, however, there have been those who contended for the

absolute freedom or Sovereignty of the human will. Men will argue that

the will possesses a self-determining power. They say, for example, I

can turn my eyes up or down, the mind is quite indifferent which I do,

the will must decide. But this is a contradiction in terms. This case

supposes that I choose one thing in preference to another while I am in

a state of complete indifference. Manifestly, both cannot be true. But

it may be replied, The mind was quite indifferent until it came to have

a preference. Exactly; and at that time the will was quiescent too! But

the moment indifference vanished, choice was made, and the fact that

indifference gave place to preference, overthrows the argument that the

will is capable of choosing between two equal things. As we have said,

choice implies the acceptance of one alternative and the rejection of

the other or others.

That which determines the will is that which causes it to choose. If

the will is determined then there must be a determiner. What is it that

determines the will? We reply, The strongest motive power which is

brought to bear upon it. What this motive power is varies in different

cases. With one it may be the logic of reason, with another the voice

of conscience, with another the impulse of the emotions, with another

the whisper of the Tempter, with another the power of the Holy Spirit;

whichever of these presents the strongest motive power and exerts the

greatest influence upon the individual himself is that which impels the

will to act. In other words, the action of the will is determined by

that condition of mind (which in turn is influenced by the world, the

flesh, and the Devil, as well as by God)which has the greatest degree

of tendency to excite volition. To illustrate what we have just said

let us analyse a simple example-On a certain Lord's day afternoon a

friend of ours was suffering from a severe headache. He was anxious to

visit the sick but feared that if he did so his own condition would

grow worse, and as a consequence, be unable to attend the preaching of

the Gospel that evening. Two alternatives confronted him: to visit the

sick that afternoon and risk being sick himself, or, to take a rest

that afternoon (and visit the sick the next day) and probably arise

refreshed and fit for the evening service. Now what was it that decided

our friend in choosing between these two alternatives? The will? Not at

all. True, that in the end, the will made a choice, but the will itself

was moved to make the choice. In the above case certain considerations

presented strong motives for selecting either alternative; these

motives were balanced the one against the other by the individual

himself, i.e., his heart and mind, and the one alternative being

supported by stronger motives than the other, decision was formed

accordingly, and then the will acted. On the one side, our friend felt

impelled by a sense of duty to visit the sick; he was moved with

compassion to do so, and thus a strong motive was presented to his

mind. On the other hand, his judgement reminded him that he was feeling

far from well himself, that he badly needed a rest, that if he visited

the sick his own condition would probably be made worse, and in such

case he would be prevented from attending the preaching of the Gospel

that night; furthermore, he knew that on the morrow, the Lord willing,

he could visit the sick, and this being so, he concluded he ought to

rest that afternoon. Here then were two sets of alternatives presented

to our Christian brother: on the one side was a sense of duty plus his

own sympathy, on the other side was a sense of his own need plus a real

concern for God's glory, for he felt that he ought to attend the

preaching of the Gospel that night. The latter prevailed. Spiritual

considerations outweighed his sense of duty. Having formed his decision

the will acted accordingly and he retired to rest. An analysis of the

above case shows that the mind or reasoning faculty was directed by

spiritual considerations, and the mind regulated and controlled the

will. Hence we say that, if the will is controlled, it is neither

Sovereign nor free, but is the servant of the mind.

It is only as we see the real nature of freedom and mark that the will

is subject to the motives brought to bear upon it that we are able to

discern there is no conflict between two statements of Holy Writ which

concern our blessed Lord. In Matthew 4:1 we read, "Then was Jesus led

up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil"; but

in Mark 1:12, 13 we are told, "And immediately the Spirit drift Him

into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days,

tempted of Satan." It is utterly impossible to harmonise these two

statements by the Armenian conception of the will. But really there is

no difficulty. That Christ was "driven" implies it was by a forcible

motive or powerful impulse, such as was not to be resisted or refused;

that He was "led" denotes His freedom in going. Putting the two

together we learn that He was driven, with a voluntary condescension

thereto. So, there is the liberty of man's will and the victorious

efficacy of God's grace united together: a sinner may be "drawn" and

yet "come" to Christ-the "drawing" presenting to him the irresistible

motive, the "coming" signifying the response of his will-as Christ was

"driven" and "led" by the Spirit into the wilderness.

Human philosophy insists that it is the will which governs the man, but

the Word of God teaches that it is the heart which is the dominating

centre of our being. Many Scriptures might be quoted in substantiation

of this. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the

issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). "For from within, out of the heart of

men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders," etc.

(Mark 7:21). Here our Lord traces these sinful acts back to their

source and declares that their fountain is the "heart" and not the

will! Again: "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, but

their heart is far from Me" (Matt. 15:8). If further proof were

required we might call attention to the fact that the word "heart" is

found in the Bible more than three times oftener than is the word

"will," even though nearly half of the references to the latter refer

to God's will!

When we affirm that it is the heart and not the will which governs the

man, we are not merely striving about words, but insisting on a

distinction that is of vital importance. Here is an individual before

whom two alternatives are placed; which will he choose? We answer, the

one which is most agreeable to himself, i.e., his "heart"-the innermost

core of his being? Before the sinner is set a life of virtue and piety,

and a life of sinful indulgence; which will he follow? The latter. Why?

Because that is his choice. But does that prove the will is Sovereign?

Not at all. Go back from effect to cause. Why does the sinner choose a

life of sinful indulgence? Because he prefers it-and he does prefer it,

all arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, though of course he does

not enjoy the effects of such a course. And why does he prefer it?

Because his heart is sinful. The same alternatives, in like manner,

confront the Christian, and he chooses and strives after a life of

piety and virtue. Why? Because God has given him a new heart or nature.

Hence we say it is not the will which makes the sinner impervious to

all appeals to "forsake his way," but his corrupt and evil heart. He

will not come to Christ because he does not want to, and he does not

want to because his heart hates Him and loves sin: see Jeremiah 17:9!

In defining the will we have said above, that "the will is the faculty

of choice, the immediate cause of all action." We say the immediate

cause, for the will is not "the primary cause of any action." We say

the immediate cause, for the will is not the primary cause of any

action any more than the hand is. Just as the hand is controlled by the

muscles and nerves of the arm, and the arm by the brain; so the will is

the servant of the mind, and the mind, in turn, is affected by various

influences and motives which are brought to bear upon it. But, it may

be asked, Does not Scripture make its appeal to man's will? Is it not

written, "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"

(Rev. 22:17)? And did not our Lord say, "ye will not come to Me that ye

might have life" (John 5:40)? We answer; the appeal of Scripture is not

always made to man's "will"; other of his faculties are also addressed.

For example: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." "Hear and your

soul shall live." "Look unto Me and be ye saved." "Believe on the Lord

Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." "Come now and let us reason

together," "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," etc.,

etc.

2. THE BONDAGE OF THE HUMAN WILL.

In any treatise that proposes to deal with the human will, its nature

and functions, respect should be had to the will in three different

men, namely, unfallen Adam, the sinner, and the Lord Jesus Christ. In

unfallen Adam the will was free, free in both directions, free toward

good and free toward evil. Adam was created in a state of innocency but

not in a state of holiness, as is so often assumed and asserted. Adam's

will was therefore in a condition of moral equipoise: that is to say,

in Adam there was no constraining bias in him toward good or evil, and

as such Adam differed radically from all his descendants, as well as

from "the Man Christ Jesus." But with the sinner it is far otherwise.

The sinner is born with a will that is not in a condition of moral

equipoise, because in him there is a heart that is "deceitful above all

things and desperately wicked," and this gives him a bias toward evil.

So, too, with the Lord Jesus it was far otherwise: He also differed

radically from unfallen Adam. The Lord Jesus Christ could not sin

because He was the "Holy One of God." Before He was born into this

world it was said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and

the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that

Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"

(Luke 1:35). Speaking reverently then we say, that the will of the Son

of Man was not in a condition of moral equipoise, that is, capable of

turning toward either good or evil. The will of the Lord Jesus was

biased toward that which is good because, side by side with His

sinless, holy, perfect humanity, was His eternal Deity. Now in

contradistinction from the will of the Lord Jesus which was biased

toward good, and Adam's will which, before his fall, was in a condition

of moral equipoise-capable of turning toward either good or evil-the

sinner's will is biased toward evil, and therefore is free in one

direction only, namely, in the direction of evil. The sinner's will is

enslaved because it is in bondage to and is the servant of a depraved

heart.

In what does the sinner's freedom consist? This question is naturally

suggested by what we have just said above. The sinner is "free" in the

sense of being unforced from without. God never forces the sinner to

sin. But the sinner is not free to do either good or evil because an

evil heart within is ever inclining him toward sin. Let us illustrate

what we have in mind. I hold in my hand a book. I release it; what

happens? It falls. In which direction? Downwards; always downwards.

Why? Because, answering the law of gravity, its own weight sinks it.

Suppose I desire that book to occupy a position three feet higher; then

what? I must lift it; a power outside of that book must raise it. Such

is the relationship which fallen man sustains toward God. Whilst Divine

power up-holds him he is preserved from plunging still deeper into sin;

let that power be withdrawn and he falls-his own weight (of sin) drags

him down. God does not push him down anymore than I did that book. Let

all Divine restraint be removed and every man is capable of becoming,

would become, a Cain, a Pharaoh, a Judas. How then is the sinner to

move heavenward? By an act of his own will? Not so. A power outside of

himself must grasp hold of him and lift him every inch of the way. The

sinner is free, but free in one direction only-free to fall, free to

sin. As the Word expresses it: "For when ye were the servants of sin,

ye were free from righteousness" (Rom. 6:20). The sinner is free to do

as he pleases, always as he pleases (except as he is restrained by

God), but his pleasure is to sin.

In the opening paragraph of this chapter we insisted that a proper

conception of the nature and function of the will is of practical

importance, nay, that it constitutes a fundamental test of theological

orthodoxy or doctrinal soundness. We wish to amplify this statement and

attempt to demonstrate its accuracy. The freedom or bondage of the will

was the dividing line between Augustinianism and Pelagianism, and in

more recent times between Calvinism and Arminianism. Reduced to simple

terms this means that the difference involved was the affirmation or

denial of the total depravity of man. In taking the affirmative we

shall now consider,

3. THE IMPOTENCY OF THE HUMAN WILL.

Does it lie within the province of man's will to accept or reject the

Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour? Granted that the Gospel is preached to

the sinner, that the Holy Spirit convicts him of his lost condition,

does it, in the final analysis, He within the power of his own will to

resist or to yield himself up to God? The answer to this question

defines our conception of human depravity. That man is a fallen

creature all professing Christians will allow, but what many of them

mean by "fallen" is often difficult to determine. The general

impression seems to be that man is now mortal, that he is no longer in

the condition in which he left the hands of his Creator, that he is

liable to disease, that he inherits evil tendencies; but, that if he

employs his powers to the best of his ability somehow he will be happy

at last. O, how far short of the sad truth! Infirmities, sickness, even

corporeal death, are but trifles in comparison with the moral and

spiritual effects of the Fall! It is only by consulting the Holy

Scriptures that we are able to obtain some conception of the extent of

that terrible calamity.

When we say that man is totally depraved we mean that the entrance of

sin into the human constitution has affected every part and faculty of

man's being. Total depravity means that man is, in spirit and soul and

body, the slave of sin and the captive of the Devil-walking "according

to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in

the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). This statement ought not to

need arguing: it is a common fact of human experience. Man is unable to

realise his own aspirations and materialise his own ideals. He cannot

do the things that he would. There is a moral inability which paralyses

him. This is proof positive that he is no free man, but instead, the

slave of sin and Satan. "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts

(desires) of your father ye will do" (John 8:44). Sin is more than an

act or a series of acts; it is a state or condition. It is that which

lies behind and produces the acts. Sin has penetrated and permeated the

whole of man's make-up. It has blinded the understanding, corrupted the

heart, and alienated the mind from God. And the will has not escaped.

The will is under the dominion of sin and Satan. Therefore, the will is

not free. In short, the affections love as they do and the will chooses

as it does because of the state of the heart, and because the heart is

deceitful above all things and desperately wicked "There is none that

seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11).

We repeat our question: Does it lie within the power of the sinner's

will to yield himself up to God? Let us attempt an answer by asking

several others: Can water (of itself) rise above its own level? Can a

clean thing come out of an unclean? Can the will reverse the whole

tendency and strain of human nature? Can that which is under the

dominion of sin originate that which is pure and holy? Manifestly not.

If ever the will of a fallen and depraved creature is to move Godward a

Divine power must be brought to bear upon it which will overcome the

influences of sin that pull in a counter direction. This is only

another way of saying, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which

hath sent Me, draw him (John 6:44). In other words, God's people must

be made willing in the day of His power (Psa. 110:3). As said Mr.

Darby, "If Christ came to save that which is lost, free will has no

place. Not that God prevents men from receiving Christ-far from it. But

even when God uses all possible inducements, all that is capable of

exerting influence in the heart of man, it only serves to show that man

will have none of it, that so corrupt is his heart, and so decided his

will not to submit to God (however much it may be the devil who

encourages him to sin) that nothing can induce him to receive the Lord,

and to give up sin. If by the words, 'freedom of man,' they mean that

no one forces him to reject the Lord, this liberty fully exists. But if

it is said that, on account of the dominion of sin, of which he is the

slave, and that voluntarily, he cannot escape from his condition, and

make choice of the good-even while acknowledging it to be good, and

approving of it-then he has no liberty whatever (italics ours). He is

not subject to the law, neither indeed can be; hence, they that are in

the flesh cannot please God."

The will is not Sovereign; it is a servant because influenced and

controlled by the other faculties of man's being. The sinner is not a

free agent because he is a slave of sin-this was clearly implied in our

Lord's words, "If the Son shall therefore make you free, ye shall be

free indeed" (John 8:36). Man is a rational being and as such

responsible and accountable to God, but to affirm that he is a free

moral agent is to deny that he is totally depraved-i.e., depraved in

will as in everything else. Because man's will is governed by his mind

and heart, and because these have been vitiated and corrupted by sin,

then it follows that if ever man is to turn or move in a Godward

direction God Himself must work in him "both to will and to do of His

good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Man's boasted freedom is in truth "the

bondage of corruption"; he "serves divers lusts and pleasures." Said a

deeply taught servant of God, "Man is impotent as to his will. He has

no will favourable to God. I believe in free will; but then it is a

will only free to act according to nature (italics ours). A dove has no

will to eat carrion; a raven no will to eat the clean food of the dove.

Put the nature of the dove into the raven and it will eat the food of

the dove. Satan could have no will for holiness. We speak it with

reverence, God could have no will for evil. The sinner in his sinful

nature could never have a will according to God. For this he must be

born again" (J. Denham Smith). This is just what we have contended for

throughout this chapter-the will is regulated by the nature.

Among the "decrees" of the Council of Trent (1563), which is the avowed

standard of Popery, we find the following:

"If any one shall affirm, that man's free-will, moved and excited by

God, does not, by consenting, co-operate with God, the mover and

exciter, so as to prepare and dispose itself for the attainment of

justification; if moreover, anyone shall say that the human will cannot

refuse complying, if it pleases; but that it is inactive, and merely

passive; let such an one be accursed"!

"If any one shall affirm, that since the fall of Adam, man's freewill

is lost and extinguished; or, that it is a thing titular, yea a name,

without a thing, and a fiction introduced by Satan into the Church; let

such an one be accursed"!

Thus, those who today insist on the free-will of the natural man

believe precisely what Rome teaches on the subject! That Roman

Catholics and Arminians walk hand in hand may be seen from others of

the decrees issued by the Council of Trent: "If any one shall affirm

that a regenerate and justified man is bound to believe that he is

certainly in the number of the elect (which 1 Thess. 1:4, 5 plainly

teaches.--A.W.P.) let such an one be accursed"! "If any one shall

affirm with positive and absolute certainty, that he shall surely have

the gift of perseverance to the end (which John 10:28-30 assuredly

guarantees, A. W. P.); let him be accursed"!

In order for any sinner to be saved three things were indispensable:

God the Father had to purpose his salvation, God the Son had to

purchase it, God the Spirit has to apply it. God does more than

"propose" to us: were He only to "invite," every last one of us would

be lost. This is strikingly illustrated in the Old Testament. In Ezra

1:1-3 we read, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the

word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD

stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a

proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing

saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the LORD God of Heaven hath

given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He hath charged me to build

Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of

all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem

which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel." Here

was an "offer" made, made to a people in captivity, affording them

opportunity to leave and return to Jerusalem-God's dwelling-place. Did

all Israel eagerly respond to this offer? No indeed. The vast majority

were content to remain in the enemy's land. Only an insignificant

"remnant" availed themselves of this overture of mercy! And why did

they? Hear the answer of Scripture: "Then rose up the chief of the

fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with

all whose spirit God had stirred up, to go up to build the house of the

LORD which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5)! In like manner, God "stirs up"

the spirits of His elect when the effectual call comes to them, and not

till then do they have any willingness to respond to the Divine

proclamation.

The superficial work of many of the professional evangelists of the

last fifty years is largely responsible for the erroneous views now

current upon the bondage of the natural man, encouraged by the laziness

of those in the pew in their failure to "prove all things" (1 Thess.

5:21). The average evangelical pulpit conveys the impression that it

lies wholly in the power of the sinner whether or not he shall be

saved. It is said that "God has done His part, now man must do his."

Alas, what can a lifeless man do, and man by nature is "dead in

trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1)! If this were really believed there

would be more dependence upon the Holy Spirit to come in with His

miracle-working power and less confidence in our attempts to "win men

for Christ."

When addressing the unsaved, preachers often draw an analogy between

God's sending of the Gospel to the sinner, and a sick man in bed with

some healing medicine on a table by his side: all he needs to do is

reach forth his hand and take it. But in order for this illustration to

be in any wise true to the picture which Scripture gives us of the

fallen and depraved sinner, the sick man in bed must be described as

one who is blind (Eph. 4:18) so that he cannot see the medicine, his

hand paralysed (Rom. 5:6) so that he is unable to reach forth for it,

and his heart not only devoid of all confidence in the medicine but

filled with hatred against the physician himself (John 15:18). O what

superficial views of man's desperate plight are now entertained! Christ

came here not to help those who were willing to help themselves, but to

do for His people what they were incapable of doing for themselves: "To

open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and

them that sit in darkness out of the prison house" (Isa. 42:7).

Now in conclusion let us anticipate and dispose of the usual and

inevitable objection-Why preach the Gospel if man is powerless to

respond? why did the sinner come to Christ if sin has so enslaved him

that he has no power in himself to come? Reply: We do not preach the

Gospel because we believe that men are free moral agents and therefore

capable of receiving Christ, but we preach it because we are commanded

to do so (Mark 16:15); and though to them that perish it is foolishness

yet, "unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

"The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is

stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25). The sinner is dead in trespasses and

sins (Eph. 2:1), and a dead man is utterly incapable of willing

anything, hence it is that "they that are in the flesh (the

unregenerate) cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8).

To fleshly wisdom it appears the height of folly to preach the Gospel

to those that are dead, and therefore beyond the reach of doing

anything themselves. Yes, but God's ways are different from ours. It

pleases God "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe"

(1 Cor. 1:21). Man may deem it folly to prophesy to "dead bones" and to

say unto them, "O ye dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord" (Ezek.

37:4). Ah! but then it is the Word of the Lord, and the words He speaks

"they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). Wise men standing by

the grave of Lazarus might pronounce it an evidence of insanity when

the Lord addressed a dead man with the words, "Lazarus, Come forth."

Ah! but He who thus spake was and is Himself the Resurrection and the

Life, and at His word even the dead live! We go forth to preach the

Gospel, then, not because we believe that sinners have within

themselves the power to receive the Saviour it proclaims but because

the Gospel itself is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that

believeth, and because we know that "as many as were ordained to

eternal life" (Acts 13:48) shall believe (John 6:37; 10:16-note the

"shall's"!) in God's appointed time, for it is written "Thy people

shall be willing in the day of Thy power" (Psa. 110:3)!

What we have set forth in this chapter is not a product of "modern

thought"; no indeed, it is at direct variance with it. It is those of

the past few generations who have departed so far from the teachings of

their scripturally-instructed fathers. In the thirty-nine Articles of

the Church of England we read, "The condition of man after the fall of

Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own

natural strength and good works to faith, and calling upon God:

Wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to

God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us (being

before-hand with us), that we may have a good will, and working with

us, when we have that good will" (Article 10). In the Westminster

Catechism of Faith (adopted by the Presbyterians) we read, "The

sinfulness of that state whereinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of

Adam's first sin, the wont of that righteousness wherein he was

created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly

indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually

good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually" (Answer to

question 25). So in the Baptists' Philadelphian Confession of Faith,

1742, we read, "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost

all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as

a natural man, being altogether averse from good, and dead in sin, is

not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself

thereunto" (Chapter 9).

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[10] Since writing the above we have read an article by the late J. N.

Darby entitled, "Man's So-Called Freewill," that opens with these

words: "This re-appearance of the doctrine of freewill serves to

support that of the pretensions of the natural man to be not

irremediably fallen, for this is what such doctrine tends to. All who

have never been deeply convicted of sin, all persons in whom this

conviction is based on gross external sins, believe more or less in

freewill."

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CHAPTER EIGHT

SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God"

(Rom. 14:12).

In our last chapter we considered at some length the much debated and

difficult question of the human will. We have shown that the will of

the natural man is neither Sovereign nor free but, instead, a servant

and slave. We have argued that a right conception of the sinner's

will-its servitude-is essential to a just estimate of his depravity and

ruin. The utter corruption and degradation of human nature is something

which man hates to acknowledge, and which he will hotly and insistently

deny until he is "taught of God." Much, very much, of the unsound

doctrine which we now hear on every hand is the direct and logical

outcome of man's repudiation of God's expressed estimate of human

depravity. Men are claiming that they are "increased with goods, and

have need of nothing," and know not that they are "wretched and

miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). They prate

about the 'Ascent of Man,' and deny his Fall. They put darkness for

light and light for darkness. They boast of the 'free moral agency' of

man when, in fact, he is in bondage to sin and enslaved by Satan-"taken

captive by him at his will" (2 Tim. 2:26). But if the natural man is

not a 'free moral agent,' does it also follow that he is not

accountable?

'Free moral agency' is an expression of human invention and, as we have

said before, to talk of the freedom of the natural man is flatly to

repudiate his spiritual ruin. Nowhere does Scripture speak of the

freedom or moral ability of the sinner, on the contrary, it insists on

his moral and spiritual inability.

This is, admittedly, the most difficult branch of our subject. Those

who have ever devoted much study to this theme have uniformly

recognised that the harmonising of God's Sovereignty with Man's

Responsibility is the gordian knot of theology.

The main difficulty encountered is to define the relationship between

God's Sovereignty and man's responsibility. Many have summarily

disposed of the difficulty by denying its existence. A certain class of

theologians, in their anxiety to maintain man's responsibility, have

magnified it beyond all due proportions until God's Sovereignty has

been lost sight of, and in not a few instances flatly denied. Others

have acknowledged that the Scriptures present both the Sovereignty of

God and the responsibility of man but affirm that in our present finite

condition and with our limited knowledge it is impossible to reconcile

the two truths, though it is the bounden duty of the believer to

receive both. The present writer believes that it has been too readily

assumed that the Scriptures themselves do not reveal the several points

which show the conciliation of God's Sovereignty and man's

responsibility. While perhaps the Word of God does not clear up all the

mystery (and this is said with reserve), it does throw much light upon

the problem, and it seems to us more honouring to God and His Word to

prayerfully search the Scriptures for the completer solution of the

difficulty, and even though others have thus far searched in vain that

ought only to drive us more and more to our knees. God has been pleased

to reveal many things out of His Word during the last century which

were hidden from earlier students. Who then dare affirm that there is

not much to be learned yet respecting our inquiry!

As we have said above, our chief difficulty is to determine the

meeting-point of God's Sovereignty and man's responsibility. To many it

has seemed that for God to assert His Sovereignty, for Him to put forth

His power and exert a direct influence upon man, for Him to do anything

more than warn or invite, would be to interfere with man's freedom,

destroy his responsibility, and reduce him to a machine. It is sad

indeed to find one like the late Dr. Pierson-whose writings are

generally so scriptural and helpful-saying, "It is a tremendous thought

that even God Himself cannot control my moral frame, or constrain my

moral choice. He cannot prevent me defying and denying Him, and would

not exercise His power in such directions if He could, and could not if

He would" ("A Spiritual Clinique"). It is sadder still to discover that

many other respected and loved brethren are giving expression to the

same sentiments. Sad, because directly at variance with the Holy

Scriptures.

It is our desire to face honestly the difficulties involved, and to

examine them carefully in what light God has been pleased to grant us.

The chief difficulties might be expressed thus: first, How is it

possible for God to so bring His power to bear upon men that they are

prevented from doing what they desire to do, and impelled to do other

things they do not desire to do, and yet to preserve their

responsibility? Second, How can the sinner be held responsible for the

doing of what he is unable to do? And how can he be justly condemned

for not doing what he could not do? Third, How is it possible for God

to decree that men shall commit certain sins, hold them responsible in

the committal of them, and adjudge them guilty because they committed

them? Fourth, How can the sinner be held responsible to receive Christ,

and be damned for rejecting Him, when God had foreordained him to

condemnation? We shall now deal with these several problems in the

above order. May the Holy Spirit Himself be our Teacher so that in His

light we may see light.

1. How is it possible for God to so bring His power to bear upon men

that they are PREVENTED from doing what they desire to do, and IMPELLED

to do other things they do not desire to do, and yet to preserve their

responsibility?

It would seem that if God put forth His power and exerted a direct

influence upon men their freedom would be interfered with. It would

appear that if God did anything more than warn and invite men their

responsibility would be infringed upon. We are told that God must not

coerce man, still less compel him, or otherwise he would be reduced to

a machine. This sounds very plausible; it appears to be good philosophy

and based upon sound reasoning; it has been almost universally accepted

as an axiom in ethics; nevertheless, it is refuted by Scripture!

Let us turn first to Genesis 20:6: "And God said unto him in a dream,

Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I

also withheld thee from sinning against Me: therefore suffered I thee

not to touch her." It is argued, almost universally, that God must not

interfere with man's liberty, that he must not coerce or compel him,

lest he be reduced to a machine. But the above Scripture proves,

unmistakably proves, that it is not impossible for God to exert His

power upon man without destroying his responsibility. Here is a case

where God did exert His power, restrict man's freedom, and prevent him

from doing that which he otherwise would have done.

Ere turning from this Scripture let us note how it throws light upon

the case of the first man. Would-be philosophers who sought to be wise

above that which was written have argued that God could not have

prevented Adam's fall without reducing him to a mere automaton. They

tell us, constantly, that God must not coerce or compel His creatures

otherwise He would destroy their accountability. But the answer to all

such philosophisings is, that Scripture records a number of instances

where we are expressly told God did prevent certain of His creatures

from sinning both against Himself and against His people, in view of

which all men's reasonings are utterly worthless. If God could

"withhold" Abimelech from sinning against Him then why was He unable to

do the same with Adam? Should someone ask, Then why did not God do so?

we might return the question by asking, Why did not God "withhold"

Satan from falling? or, Why did not God "withhold" the Kaiser from

starting the War? The usual reply is, as we have said, God could not

without interfering with man's "freedom" and reducing him to a machine.

But the case of Abimelech proves conclusively that such a reply is

untenable and erroneous-we might add wicked and blasphemous, for who

are we to limit the Most High! How dare any finite creature take it

upon him to say what the Almighty can and cannot do? Should we be

pressed further as to why God refused to exercise His power and prevent

Adam's fall, we should say, Because Adam's fall better served His own

wise and blessed purpose-among other things, it provided an opportunity

to demonstrate that where sin had abounded grace could much more

abound. But we might ask further: Why did God place in the garden the

tree of the knowledge of good and evil when He foresaw that man would

disobey His prohibition and eat of it; for mark, it was God and not

Satan who made that tree. Should someone respond, Then is God the

Author of Sin? We would have to ask, in turn, What is meant by

"Author"? Plainly it was God's will that sin should enter this world

otherwise it would not have entered, for nothing happens save as God

has eternally decreed. Moreover, there was more than a bare permission

for God only permits that which He has purposed. But we leave now the

origin of sin, insisting once more, however, that God could have

"withheld" Adam from sinning without destroying his responsibility.

The case of Abimelech does not stand alone. Another illustration of the

same principle is seen in the history of Balaam, already noticed in the

last chapter, but concerning which a further word is in place. Balak

the Moabite sent for this heathen prophet to "curse" Israel. A handsome

reward was offered for his services, and a careful reading of Numbers

22-24 will show that Balaam was willing, yea, anxious, to accept

Balak's offer and thus sin against God and His people. But Divine power

"withheld" him. Mark his own admission, "And Balaam said unto Balak,

Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything?

the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak" (Num.

22:38). Again, after Balak had remonstrated with Balaam, we read "He

answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD

hath put in my mouth?...Behold, I have received commandment to bless:

and He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it" (23:12, 20). Surely these

verses show us God's power, and Balaam's powerlessness: man's will

frustrated and God's will performed. But was Balaam's "freedom" or

responsibility destroyed? Certainly not, as we shall yet seek to show.

One more illustration: "And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the

kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no

war against Jehoshaphat" (2 Chron. 17:10). The implication here is

clear. Had not the "fear of the LORD" fallen upon these kingdoms they

would have made war upon Judah. God's restraining power alone prevented

them. Had their own will been allowed to act "war" would have been the

consequence. Thus we see, that Scripture teaches that God "withholds"

nations as well as individuals, and that when it pleaseth Him to do so

He interposes and prevents war. Compare further Genesis 35:5.

The question which now demands our consideration is, How is it possible

for God to "withhold" men from sinning and yet not to interfere with

their liberty and responsibility-a question which so many say is

incapable of solution in our present finite condition. This question

causes us to ask, In what does moral "freedom," real moral freedom,

consist? We answer, it is the being delivered from the BONDAGE of sin.

The more any soul is emancipated from the thraldom of sin the more does

he enter into a state of freedom-"If the Son therefore shall make you

free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). In the above instances God

"withheld" Abimelech, Balaam, and the heathen kingdoms from sinning,

and therefore we affirm that He did not in any wise interfere with

their real freedom. The nearer a soul approximates to sinlessness the

nearer does he approach to God's holiness. Scripture tells us that God

"cannot lie," and that He "cannot be tempted," but is He any the less

free because He cannot do that which is evil? Surely not. Then is it

not evident that the more man is raised up to God, and the more he be

"withheld" from sinning, the greater is his real freedom!

A pertinent example setting forth the meeting-place of God's

Sovereignty and man's responsibility, as it relates to the question of

moral freedom, is found in connection with the giving to us of the Holy

Scriptures. In the communication of His Word God was pleased to employ

human instruments, and in the using of them He did not reduce them to

mere mechanical amanuenses: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of

the Scripture is of any private interpretation (Greek: of its own

origination). For the prophecy came not at any time by the will of man:

but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"

(2Peter 1:20, 21). Here we have man's responsibility and God's

Sovereignty placed in juxtaposition. These holy men were "moved"

(Greek: "borne along") by the Holy Spirit, yet was not their moral

responsibility disturbed nor their "freedom" impaired. God enlightened

their minds, enkindled their hearts, revealed to them His truth, and so

controlled them that error on their part was, by Him, made impossible,

as they communicated His mind and will to men. But what was it that

might have, would have, caused error, had not God controlled as He did

the instruments which He employed? The answer is SIN, the sin which was

in them. But as we have seen, the holding in check of sin, the

preventing of the exercise of the carnal mind in these "holy men" was

not a destroying of their "freedom," rather was it the inducting of

them into real freedom.

A final word should be added here concerning the nature of true

liberty. There are three chief things concerning which men in general

greatly err: misery and happiness, folly and wisdom, bondage and

liberty. The world counts none miserable but the afflicted, and none

happy but the prosperous, because they judge by the present ease of the

flesh. Again; the world is pleased with a false show of wisdom (which

is "foolishness" with God), neglecting that which makes wise unto

salvation. As to liberty, men would be at their own disposal and live

as they please. They suppose the only true liberty is to be at the

command and under the control of none above themselves, and live

according to their heart's desire. But this is a thraldom and bondage

of the worst kind. True liberty is not the power to live as we please,

but to live as we ought! Hence, the only One Who has ever trod this

earth since Adam's fall that has enjoyed perfect freedom was the Man

Christ Jesus, the Holy Servant of God, Whose meat it ever was to do the

will of the Father.

We now turn to consider the question.

2. How can the sinner be held responsible FOR the doing of what he is

UNABLE to do? And how can he be justly condemned for NOT DOING what he

COULD NOT do?

As a creature the natural man is responsible to love, obey, and serve

God; as a sinner he is responsible to repent and believe the Gospel.

But at the outset we are confronted with the fact that natural man is

unable to love and serve God, and that the sinner, of himself, cannot

repent and believe. First, let us prove what we have just said. We

begin by quoting and considering John 6:44, "No man can come to Me,

except the Father which hath sent Me draw him." The heart of the

natural man (every man) is so "desperately wicked" that if he is left

to himself he will never 'come to Christ.' This statement would not be

questioned if the full force of the words "coming to Christ" were

properly apprehended. We shall therefore digress a little at this point

to define and consider what is implied and involved in the words "No

man can come to Me"-cf.John 5:40, "Ye will not come to Me, that ye

might have life."

For the sinner to come to Christ that he might have life is for him to

realise the awful danger of his situation; is for him to see that the

sword of Divine justice is suspended over his head; is to awaken to the

fact that there is but a step betwixt him and death, and that after

death is the "judgement"; and in consequence of this discovery, is for

him to be in real earnest to escape, and in such earnestness that he

shall flee from the wrath to come, cry unto God for mercy, and agonise

to enter in at the "strait gate."

To come to Christ for life, is for the sinner to feel and acknowledge

that he is utterly destitute of any claim upon God's favour; is to see

himself as "without strength," lost and undone; is to admit that he is

deserving of nothing but eternal death, thus taking side with God

against himself; it is for him to cast himself into the dust before

God, and humbly sue for Divine mercy.

To come to Christ for life is for the sinner to abandon his own

righteousness and be ready to be made the righteousness of God in

Christ; it is to disown his own wisdom and be guided by His; it is to

repudiate his own will and be ruled by His; it is to unreservedly

receive the Lord Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, as his All in all.

Such, in part and in brief, is what is implied and involved in "coming

to Christ." But is the sinner willing to take such an attitude before

God? No; for in the first place he does not realise the danger of his

situation, and in consequence is not in real earnest after his escape;

instead, men are for the most part at ease, and apart from the

operations of the Holy Spirit whenever they are disturbed by the alarms

of conscience or the dispensations of providence they flee to any other

refuge but Christ. In the second place, they will not acknowledge that

all their righteousnesses are as filthy rags but, like the Pharisee,

will thank God they are not as the Publican. And in the third place,

they are not ready to receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour for they

are unwilling to part with their idols; they had rather hazard their

soul's eternal welfare than give them up. Hence we say that, left to

himself, the natural man is so depraved at heart that he cannot come to

Christ.

The words of our Lord quoted above by no means stand alone. Quite a

number of Scriptures set forth the moral and spiritual inability of the

natural man. In Joshua 24:19 we read, "And Joshua said unto the people,

Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is an holy God." To the Pharisees

Christ said, "Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye

cannot hear My word" (John 8:43). And again: "The carnal mind is enmity

against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed

can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom.

8:7, 8).

But now the question returns, How can God hold the sinner responsible

for failing to do what he is unable to do? This necessitates a careful

definition of terms. Just what is meant by "unable" and "cannot"?

Now let it be clearly understood that when we speak of the sinner's

inability, we do not mean that if men desired to come to Christ they

lack the necessary power to carry out their desire. No; the fact is

that the sinner's inability or absence of power is itself due to lack

of willingness to come to Christ, and this lack of willingness is the

fruit of a depraved heart. It is of first importance that we

distinguish between natural inability and moral and spiritual

inability. For example, we read, "But Ahijah could not see; for his

eyes were set by reason of his age" (1 Kings 14:4); and again, "The men

rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea

wrought, and was tempestuous against them" (Jonah 1:13). In both of

these passages the words "could not" refer to natural inability. But

when we read, "And when his brethren saw that their father loved him

(Joseph) more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not

speak peaceably unto him" (Gen. 37:4), it is clearly moral inability

that is in view. They did not lack the natural ability to "speak

peaceably unto him" for they were not dumb. Why then was it that they

"could not speak peaceably unto him"? The answer is given in the same

verse: it was because "they hated him." Again; in 2 Peter 2:14 we read

of a certain class of wicked men "having eyes full of adultery, and

that cannot cease from sin." Here again it is moral inability that is

in view. Why is it that these men "cannot cease from sin"? The answer

is, Because their eyes were full of adultery. So of Romans 8:8-"They

that are in the flesh cannot please God": here is spiritual inability.

Why is it that the natural man "cannot please God"? Because he is

"alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18). No man can choose that

from which his heart is averse-"O generation of vipers, how can ye,

being evil, speak good things?" (Matt. 12:34). "No man can come to Me,

except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (John 6:44). Here again

it is moral and spiritual inability which is before us. Why is it the

sinner cannot come to Christ unless he is "drawn"? The answer is,

Because his wicked heart loves sin and hates Christ.

We trust we have made it clear that the Scriptures distinguish sharply

between natural ability and moral and spiritual inability. Surely all

can see the difference between the blindness of Bartimaeus, who was

ardently desirous of receiving his sight, and the Pharisees, whose eyes

were closed "lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear

with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be

converted" (Matt. 13:15). But should it be said, "The natural man could

come to Christ if he wished to do so," we answer, Ah! but in that IF

lies the hinge of the whole matter. The inability of the sinner

consists of the want of moral power to wish and will so as to actually

perform.

What we have contended for above is of first importance. Upon the

distinction between the sinner's natural Ability, and his moral and

spiritual Inability rests his Responsibility. The depravity of the

human heart does not destroy man's accountability to God; so far from

this being the case the very moral inability of the sinner only serves

to increase his guilt. This is easily proven by a reference to the

Scriptures cited above. We read that Joseph's brethren "could not speak

peaceably unto him," and why? It was because they "hated" him. But was

this moral inability of theirs any excuse? Surely not: in this very

moral inability consisted the greatness of their sin. So of those

concerning whom it is said, "They cannot cease from sin" (2 Peter

2:14), and why? Because "their eyes were full of adultery," but that

only made their case worse. It was a real fact that they could not

cease from sin, yet this did not excuse them-it only made their sin the

greater.

Should some sinner here object, I cannot help being born into this

world with a depraved heart and therefore I am not responsible for my

moral and spiritual inability which accrue from it, the reply would be,

Responsibility and Culpability He in the indulgence of the depraved

propensities, the free indulgence, for God does not force any to sin.

Men might pity me but they certainly would not excuse me if I gave vent

to a fiery temper and then sought to extenuate myself on the ground of

having inherited that temper from my parents. Their own common sense is

sufficient to guide their judgement in such a case as this. They would

argue I was responsible to restrain my temper. Why then cavil against

this same principle in the case supposed above? "Out of thine own mouth

will I judge thee thou wicked servant" surely applies here! What would

the reader say to a man who had robbed him and who later argued in

defence, "I cannot help being a thief, that is my nature"? Surely the

reply would be, Then the penitentiary is the proper place for that man.

What then shall be said to the one who argues that he cannot help

following the bent of his sinful heart? Surely, that the Lake of Fire

is where such an one must go. Did ever a murderer plead that he hated

his victim so much that he could not go near him without slaying him.

Would not that only magnify the enormity of his crime! Then what of the

one who loves sin so much that he is at "enmity against God"!

The fact of man's responsibility is almost universally acknowledged. It

is inherent in man's moral nature. It is not only taught in Scripture

but witnessed to by the natural conscience. The basis or ground of

human responsibility is human ability. What is implied by this general

term "ability" must now be defined. Perhaps a concrete example will be

more easily grasped by the average reader than an abstract argument.

Suppose a man owed me $100 and could find plenty of money for his own

pleasures but none for me, yet pleaded that he was unable to pay me.

What would I say? I would say that the only ability that was lacking

was an honest heart. But would it not be an unfair construction of my

words if a friend of my dishonest debtor should say I had stated that

an honest heart was that which constituted the ability to pay the debt?

No; I would reply: the ability of my debtor lies in the power of his

hand to write me a check, and this he has, but what is lacking is an

honest principle. It is his power to write me a check which makes him

responsible to do so, and the fact that he lacks an honest heart does

not destroy his accountability. [11]

Now, in like manner, the sinner while altogether lacking in moral and

spiritual ability does, nevertheless, possess natural ability, and this

it is which renders him accountable unto God. Men have the same natural

faculties to love God with as they have to hate Him with, the same

hearts to believe with as to disbelieve, and it is their failure to

love and believe which constitutes their guilt. An idiot or an infant

is not personally responsible to God, because lacking in natural

ability. But the normal man who is endowed with rationality, who is

gifted with a conscience that is capable of distinguishing between

right and wrong, who is able to weigh eternal issues IS a responsible

being, and it is because he does possess these very faculties that he

will yet have to "give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12).

We say again that the above distinction between the natural ability and

the moral and spiritual inability of the sinner is of prime importance.

By nature he possesses natural ability but lacks moral and spiritual

ability. The fact that he does not possess the latter does not destroy

his responsibility, because his responsibility rests upon the fact that

he does possess the former. Let me illustrate again. Here are two men

guilty of theft: the first is an idiot, the second perfectly sane but

the offspring of criminal parents. No just judge would sentence the

former; but every right-minded judge would the latter. Even though the

second of these thieves possessed a vitiated moral nature inherited

from criminal parents that would not excuse him, providing he was a

normal rational being. Here then is the ground of human

accountability-the possession of rationality plus the gift of

conscience. It is because the sinner is endowed with these natural

faculties that he is a responsible creature; because he does not use

his natural powers for God's glory, constitutes his guilt.

How can it remain consistent with His mercy that God should require the

debt of obedience from him that is not able to pay? In addition to what

has been said above it should be pointed out that God has not lost His

right, even though man has lost his power. The creature's impotence

does not cancel his obligation. A drunken servant is a servant still,

and it is contrary to all sound reasoning to argue that his master

loses his rights through his servant's default. Moreover, it is of

first importance that we should ever bear in mind that God contracted

with us in Adam, who was our federal head and representative, and in

him God gave us a power which we lost through our first parent's fall;

but though our power is gone, nevertheless, God may justly demand His

due of obedience and of service.

We turn now to ponder,

3. How is it possible for God to DECREE that men SHOULD commit certain

sins, hold them RESPONSIBLE in the committal of them, and adjudge them

GUILTY because they committed them?

Let us now consider the extreme case of Judas. We hold that it is clear

from Scripture that God decreed from all eternity that Judas should

betray the Lord Jesus. If anyone should challenge this statement we

refer him to the prophecy of Zechariah through whom God declared that

His Son should be sold for "thirty pieces of silver" (Zech. 11:12). As

we have said in earlier pages, in prophecy God makes known what will

be, and in making known what will be He is but revealing to us what He

has ordained shall be. That Judas was the one through whom the prophecy

of Zechariah was fulfilled needs not to be argued. But now the question

we have to face is, Was Judas a responsible agent in fulfilling this

decree of God? We reply that he was. Responsibility attaches mainly to

the motive and intention of the one committing the act. This is

recognised on every hand. Human law distinguishes between a blow

inflicted by accident (without evil design) and a blow delivered with

'malice aforethought.' Apply then this same principle to the case of

Judas. What was the design of his heart when he bargained with the

priests? Manifestly he had no conscious desire to fulfil any decree of

God, though unknown to himself he was actually doing so. On the

contrary, his intention was evil only, and therefore, though God had

decreed and directed his act, nevertheless his own evil intention

rendered him justly guilty as he afterwards acknowledged himself-"I

have betrayed innocent blood." It was the same with the Crucifixion of

Christ. Scripture plainly declares that He was "delivered by the

determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23), and that

though "the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered

together against the Lord, and against His Christ" yet, notwithstanding

it was but "for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined

before to be done" (Acts 4:26, 28); which verses teach very much more

than a bare permission by God, declaring, as they do, that the

Crucifixion and all its details had been decreed by God. Yet,

nevertheless, it was by "wicked hands," not merely "human hands" that

our Lord was "crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). "Wicked" because the

intention of His crucifiers was only evil.

But it might be objected that if God decreed that Judas should betray

Christ, and that the Jews and Gentiles should crucify Him they could

not do otherwise, and therefore, they were not responsible for their

intentions. The answer is, God had decreed that they should perform the

acts they did, but in the actual perpetration of these deeds they were

justly guilty because their own purposes in the doing of them was evil

only. Let it be emphatically said that God does not produce the sinful

dispositions of any of His creatures, though He does restrain and

direct them to the accomplishing of His own purposes. Hence He is

neither the Author nor the Approver of sin. This distinction was

expressed thus by Augustine: "That men sin proceeds from themselves;

that in sinning they perform this or that action, is from the power of

God who divideth the darkness according to His pleasure." Thus it is

written, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his

steps" (Prov. 16:9). What we would here insist upon is, that God's

decrees are not the necessitating cause of the sins of men but the

fore-determined and prescribed boundings and directings of men's sinful

acts. In connection with the betrayal of Christ God did not decree that

He should be sold by one of His creatures and then take up a good man,

instil an evil desire into his heart and thus force him to perform the

terrible deed in order to execute His decree. No; not so do the

Scriptures represent it. Instead, God decreed the act and selected the

one who was to perform the act, but He did not make him evil in order

that he should perform the deed; on the contrary, the betrayer was a

"devil" at the time the Lord Jesus chose him as one of the twelve (John

6:70), and in the exercise and manifestation of his own deviltry God

simply directed his actions, actions which were perfectly agreeable to

his own vile heart, and performed with the most wicked intentions. Thus

it was with the Crucifixion.

4. How can the sinner be held responsible to receive Christ, and be

damned for rejecting Him, when God FOREORDAINED him TO condemnation?

Really, this question has been covered in what has been said under the

other queries, but for the benefit of those who are exercised upon this

point we give it a separate, though brief, examination. In considering

the above difficulty the following points should be carefully weighed:

In the first place, no sinner, while he is in this world, knows for

certain, nor can he know, that he is a "vessel of wrath fitted to

destruction." This belongs to the hidden counsels of God to which he

has not access. God's secret will is no business of his; God's revealed

will (in the Word) is the standard of human responsibility. And God's

revealed will is plain. Each sinner is among those whom God now

"commandeth to repent" (Acts 17:30). Each sinner who hears the Gospel

is "commanded" to believe (1 John 3:23). And all who do truly repent

and believe are saved. Therefore, is every sinner responsible to repent

and believe.

In the second place, it is the duty of every sinner to search the

Scriptures which "are able to make thee wise unto salvation" (2 Tim.

3:15). It is the sinner's "duty" because the Son of God has commanded

him to search the Scriptures (John 5:39). If he searches them with a

heart that is seeking after God then does he put himself in the way

where God is accustomed to meet with sinners. Upon this point the

Puritan Manton has written very helpfully.

"I cannot say to every one that ploweth, infallibly, that he shall have

a good crop; but this I can say to him, It is God's use to bless the

diligent and provident. I cannot say to every one that desireth

posterity, Marry, and you shall have children; I cannot say infallibly

to him that goeth forth to battle for his country's good that he shall

have victory and success; but I can say, as Joab (1 Chron. 19:13) 'Be

of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people

and the cities of our God: and let the LORD do that which is good in

His sight.' I cannot say infallibly you shall have grace; but I can say

to every one, Let him use the means, and leave the success of his

labour and his own salvation to the will and good pleasure of God. I

cannot say this infallibly, for there is no obligation upon God. And

still this work is made the fruit of God's will and mere arbitrary

dispensation-'Of His own will begat He us by the Word of Truth' (James

1:18). Let us do what God hath commanded, and let God do what He will.

And I need not say so; for the whole world in all their actings are and

should be guided by this principle. Let us do our duty, and refer the

success to God, Whose ordinary practice is to meet with the creature

that seeketh after Him; yea, He is with us already; this earnest

importunity in the use of means proceeding from the earnest impression

of His grace. And therefore, since He is beforehand with us, and hath

not showed any backwardness to our good, we have no reason to despair

of His goodness and mercy, but rather to hope for the best" (Vol. XXI,

page 312).

God has been pleased to give to men the Holy Scriptures which "testify"

of the Saviour, and make known the way of salvation. Every sinner has

the same natural faculties for the reading of the Bible as he has for

the reading of the newspaper; and if he is illiterate or blind so that

he is unable to read he has the same mouth with which to ask a friend

to read the Bible to him, as he has to enquire concerning other

matters. If, then, God has given to men His Word, and in that Word has

made known the way of salvation, and if men are commanded to search

those Scriptures which are able to make them wise unto salvation, and

they refuse to do so, then it is plain that they are justly censurable,

that their blood lies on their own heads, and that God can righteously

cast them into the Lake of Fire.

In the third place, should it be objected, Admitting all you have said

above, Is it not still a fact that each of the non-elect is unable to

repent and believe? The reply is, Yes. Of every sinner it is a fact

that, of himself, he cannot come to Christ. And from God's side the

"cannot" is absolute. But we are now dealing with the responsibility of

the sinner (the sinner foreordained to condemnation, though he knows it

not), and from the human side the inability of the sinner is a moral

one, as previously pointed out. Moreover, it needs to be borne in mind

that in addition to the moral inability of the sinner there is a

voluntary inability, too. The sinner must be regarded not only as

impotent to do good but as delighting in evil. From the human side,

then, the "cannot" is a will not; it is a voluntary impotence. Man's

impotence lies in his obstinacy. Hence, is everyone left "without

excuse," and hence, is God "clear" when He judgeth (Psa. 51:4), and

righteous in damning all who "love darkness rather than light."

That God does require what is beyond our own power to render is clear

from many Scriptures. God gave the Law to Israel at Sinai and demanded

a full compliance with it, and solemnly pointed out what would be the

consequences of their disobedience (see Deut. 28). But will any readers

be so foolish as to affirm that Israel were capable of fully obeying

the Law! If they do, we would refer them to Romans 8:3 where we are

expressly told, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak

through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful

flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."

Come now to the New Testament. Take such passages as Matthew 5:48, "Be

ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is

perfect." 1 Corinthians 15:34. "Awake to righteousness, and sin not." 1

John 2:1, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye

sin not." Will any reader say he is capable in himself of complying

with these demands of God? If so, it is useless for us to argue with

him.

But now the question arises, Why has God demanded of man that which he

is incapable of performing? The first answer is, Because God refuses to

lower His standard to the level of our sinful infirmities. Being

perfect, God must set a perfect standard before us. Still we must ask,

If man is incapable of measuring up to God's standard, wherein lies his

responsibility? Difficult as it seems the problem is nevertheless

capable of simple and satisfactory solution.

Man is responsible to (first) acknowledge before God his inability, and

(second) to cry unto Him for enabling grace. Surely this will be

admitted by every Christian reader. It is my bounden duty to own before

God my ignorance, my weakness, my sinfulness, my impotence to comply

with His holy and just requirements. It is also my bounden duty, as

well as blessed privilege, to earnestly beseech God to give me the

wisdom, strength, grace, which will enable me to do that which is

pleasing in His sight; to ask Him to work in me "both to will and to do

of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

In like manner, the sinner, every sinner, is responsible to call upon

the Lord. Of himself he can neither repent nor believe. He can neither

come to Christ nor turn from his sins. God tells him so; and his first

duty is to "set to his seal that God is true." His second duty is to

cry unto God for His enabling power; to ask God in mercy to overcome

his enmity and "draw" him to Christ; to bestow upon him the gifts of

repentance and faith. If he will do so, sincerely from the heart, then

most surely God will respond to his appeal, for it is written, "For

whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom.

10:13).

Suppose I had slipped on the icy pavement late at night, and had broken

my hip. I am unable to arise; if I remain on the ground I must freeze

to death. What, then, ought I to do? If I am determined to perish I

shall He there silent; but I shall be to blame for such a course. If I

am anxious to be rescued I shall lift up my voice and cry for help. So

the sinner, though unable of himself to rise and take the first step

toward Christ, is responsible to cry to God, and if he does (from the

heart) there is a Deliverer to hand. God is "not far from every one of

us" (Acts 17:27); yea, He is "a very present help in trouble" (Psa.

46:1). But if the sinner refuses to cry unto the Lord, if he is

determined to perish, then his blood is on his own head, and his

"damnation is just" (Rom. 3:8).

A brief word now concerning the extent of human responsibility.

It is obvious that the measure of human responsibility varies in

different cases, and is greater or less with particular individuals.

The standard of measurement was given in the Saviour's words, "For unto

whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48).

Surely God did not require as much from those living in Old Testament

times as He does from those who have been born during the Christian

dispensation. Surely God will not require as much from those who lived

during the 'dark ages,' when the Scriptures were accessible to but a

few, as He will from those of this generation when practically every

family in the land owns a copy of His Word for themselves. In the same

way, God will not demand from the heathen what He will from those in

Christendom. The heathen will not perish because they have not believed

in Christ, but because they failed to live up to the light which they

did have-the testimony of God in nature and conscience.

To sum up. The fact of man's responsibility rests upon his natural

ability, is witnessed to by conscience, and is insisted on throughout

the Scriptures. The ground of man's responsibility is that he is a

rational creature capable of weighing eternal issues, and that he

possesses a written Revelation from God in which his relationship with

and duty toward his Creator is plainly defined. The measure of

responsibility varies in different individuals, being determined by the

degree of light each has enjoyed from God. The problem of human

responsibility receives at least a partial solution in the Holy

Scriptures, and it is our solemn obligation as well as privilege to

search them prayerfully and carefully for further light, looking to the

Holy Spirit to guide us "into all truth." It is written, "The meek will

He guide in judgement: and the meek will He teach His way" (Psa. 25:9).

In conclusion it remains to point out that it is the responsibility of

every man to use the means which God has placed to his hand. An

attitude of fatalistic inertia, because I know that God has irrevocably

decreed whatsoever comes to pass, is to make a sinful and hurtful use

of what God has revealed for the comfort of my heart. The same God who

has decreed that a certain end shall be accomplished has also decreed

that that end shall be attained through and as the result of His own

appointed means. God does not disdain the use of means, nor must I. For

example: God has decreed that "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and

harvest... shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22); but that does not mean man's

ploughing of the ground and sowing of the seed are needless. No; God

moves men to do those very things, blesses their labours, and so

fulfils His own ordination. In like manner, God has, from the

beginning, chosen a people unto salvation; but that does not mean there

is no need for evangelists to preach the Gospel, or for sinners to

believe it; it is by such means that His eternal counsels are

effectuated.

To argue that because God has irrevocably determined the eternal

destiny of every man, relieves us of all responsibility for any concern

about our souls, or any diligent use of the means to salvation, would

be on a par with refusing to perform my temporal duties because God has

fixed my earthly lot. And that He has is clear from Acts 17:26; Job

7:1; 14:15, etc. If then the foreordination of God may consist with the

respective activities of man in present concerns, why not in the

future? What God has joined together we must not cut asunder. Whether

we can or cannot see the link which unites the one to the other our

duty is plain: "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but

those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children

forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

In Acts 27:22 God made known that He had ordained the temporal

preservation of all who accompanied Paul in the ship; yet the Apostle

did not hesitate to say, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be

saved" (v. 31). God appointed that means for the execution of what He

had decreed. From 2 Kings 20 we learn that God was absolutely resolved

to add fifteen years to Hezekiah's life, yet he must take a lump of

figs and lay it on his boil! Paul knew that he was eternally secure in

the hand of Christ (John 10:28), yet he "kept under his body" (1 Cor.

9:27). The Apostle John assured those to whom he wrote, "Ye shall abide

in Him," yet in the very next verse he exhorted them, "And now, little

children, abide in Him" (1 John 2:27, 28). It is only by taking heed to

this vital principle, that we are responsible to use the means of God's

appointing, that we shall be enabled to preserve the balance of Truth

and be saved from a paralysing fatalism.

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[11] The terms of this example are suggested by an illustration used by

the late Andrew Fuller.

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CHAPTER NINE

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND PRAYER

"If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us"

(1 John 5:14).

Throughout this book it has been our chief aim to exalt the Creator and

abase the creature. The well-nigh universal tendency now, is to magnify

man and dishonour and degrade God. On every hand it will be found that,

when spiritual things are under discussion, the human side and element

is pressed and stressed, and the Divine side, if not altogether

ignored, is relegated to the background. This holds true of very much

of the modern teaching about prayer. In the great majority of the books

written and in the sermons preached upon prayer the human element fills

the scene almost entirely: it is the conditions which we must meet, the

promises we must "claim," the things we must do in order to get our

requests granted; and God's claims, God's rights, God's glory are

disregarded.

As a fair example of what is being given out today we subjoin a brief

editorial which appeared recently in one of the leading religious

weeklies entitled "Prayer, or Fate?"

"God in His Sovereignty has ordained that human destinies may be

changed and moulded by the will of man. This is at the heart of the

truth that prayer changes things, meaning that God changes things when

men pray. Someone has strikingly expressed it this way: 'There are

certain things that will happen in a man's life whether he prays or

not. There are other things that will happen if he prays; and will not

happen if he does not pray.' A Christian worker was impressed by these

sentences as he entered a business office and he prayed that the Lord

would open the way to speak to some one about Christ, reflecting that

things would be changed because he prayed. Then his mind turned to

other things and the prayer was forgotten. The opportunity came to

speak to the business man upon whom he was calling, but he did not

grasp it, and was on his way out when he remembered his prayer of a

half hour before, and God's answer. He promptly returned and had a talk

with the business man, who, though a church-member, had never in his

life been asked whether he was saved. Let us give ourselves to prayer,

and open the way for God to change things. Let us beware lest we become

virtual fatalists by failing to exercise our God-given wills in

praying."

The above illustrates what is being taught on the subject of prayer,

and the deplorable thing is that scarcely a voice is lifted in protest.

To say that "human destinies may be changed and moulded by the will of

man" is rank infidelity-that is the only proper term for it. Should any

one challenge this classification, we would ask them whether they can

find an infidel anywhere who would dissent from such a statement, and

we are confident that such an one could not be found. To say that "God

has ordained that human destinies may be changed and moulded by the

will of man" is absolutely untrue. "Human destiny" is settled not by

the will of man, but by the will of God. That which determines human

destiny is whether or not a man has been born again, for it is written,

"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." And as

to whose will, whether God's or man's, is responsible for the new birth

is settled, unequivocally, by John 1:13-"Which were born, not of blood,

nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but OF GOD." To

say that "human destiny" may be changed by the will of man is to make

the creature's will supreme, and that is, virtually, to dethrone God.

But what saith the Scriptures? Let the Book answer: "The LORD killeth,

and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The

Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He

raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the

dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the

throne of glory" (1 Sam. 2:6-8).

Turning back to the Editorial here under review, we are next told,

"This is at the heart of the truth that prayer changes things, meaning

that God changes things when men pray." Almost everywhere we go today

one comes across a motto-card bearing the inscription "Prayer Changes

Things." As to what these words are designed to signify is evident from

the current literature on prayer-we are to persuade God to change His

purpose. Concerning this we shall have more to say below.

Again, the Editor tells us, "Some one has strikingly expressed it this

way: 'There are certain things that will happen in a man's life whether

he prays or not. There are other things that will happen if he prays,

and will not happen if he does not pray.'" That things happen whether a

man prays or not is exemplified daily in the lives of the unregenerate,

most of whom never pray at all. That 'other things will happen if he

prays' is in need of qualification. If a believer prays in faith and

asks for those things which are according to God's will he will most

certainly obtain that for which he has asked. Again, that other things

will happen if he prays is also true in respect to the subjective

benefits derived from prayer: God will become more real to him and His

promises more precious. That other things 'will not happen if he does

not pray' is true so far as his own life is concerned-a prayerless life

means a life lived out of communion with God and all that is involved

by this. But to affirm that God will not and cannot bring to pass His

eternal purpose unless we pray is utterly erroneous, for the same God

who has decreed the end has also decreed that His end shall be reached

through His appointed means, and One of these is prayer. The God who

has determined to grant a blessing also gives a spirit of supplication

which first seeks the blessing.

The example cited in the above Editorial of the Christian worker and

the business man is a very unhappy one to say the least, for according

to the terms of the illustration the Christian worker's prayer was not

answered by God at all, inasmuch as, apparently, the way was not opened

to speak to the business man about his soul. But on leaving the office

and recalling his prayer the Christian worker (perhaps in the energy of

the flesh) determined to answer the prayer for himself, and instead of

leaving the Lord to "open the way" for him, took matters into his own

hand.

We quote next from one of the latest books issued on Prayer. In it the

author says, "The possibilities and necessity of prayer, its power and

results, are manifested in arresting and changing the purposes of God

and in relieving the stroke of His power." Such an assertion as this is

a horrible reflection upon the character of the Most High God, who

"doeth according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the

inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him,

What doest Thou?" (Dan. 4: 35). There is no need whatever for God to

change His designs or alter His purpose for the all-sufficient reason

that these were framed under the influence of perfect goodness and

unerring wisdom. Men may have occasion to alter their purposes, for in

their short-sightedness they are frequently unable to anticipate what

may arise after their plans are formed. But not so with God, for He

knows the end from the beginning. To affirm God changes His purpose is

either to impugn His goodness or to deny His eternal wisdom.

In the same book we are told, "The prayers of God's saints are the

capital stock in Heaven by which Christ carries on His great work upon

earth. The great throes and mighty convulsions on earth are the results

of these prayers. Earth is changed, revolutionised, angels move on more

powerful, more rapid wing, and God's policy is shaped as the prayers

are more numerous, more efficient." If possible, this is even worse,

and we have no hesitation in denominating it as blasphemy. In the first

place, it flatly denies Ephesians 3:11 which speaks of God's having an

"eternal purpose." If God's purpose is an eternal one then His "policy"

is not being "shaped" today. In the second place, it contradicts

Ephesians 1:11 which expressly declares that God "worketh all things

after the counsel of His own will," therefore it follows that, "God's

policy" is not being "shaped" by man's prayers. In the third place,

such a statement as the above makes the will of the creature supreme,

for if our prayers shape God's policy then is the Most High subordinate

to worms of the earth. Well might the Holy Spirit ask through the

Apostle, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His

counsellor?" (Rom. 11:34).

Such thoughts on prayer as we have been citing are due to low and

inadequate conceptions of God Himself. It ought to be apparent that

there could be little or no comfort in praying to a God that was like

the chameleon, which changes its colour every day. What encouragement

is there to lift up our hearts to One who is in one mind yesterday and

another today? What would be the use of petitioning an earthly monarch

if we knew he was so mutable as to grant a petition one day and deny it

another? Is it not the very unchangeableness of God which is our

greatest encouragement to pray? It is because He is "without

variableness or shadow of turning" we are assured that if we ask

anything according to His will we are most certain of being heard. Well

did Luther remark, "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but

laying hold of His willingness."

And this leads us to offer a few remarks concerning the design of

prayer. Why has God appointed that we should pray? The vast majority of

people would reply, In order that we may obtain from God the things

which we need. While this is one of the purposes of prayer it is by no

means the chief one. Moreover, it considers prayer only from the human

side, and prayer sadly needs to be viewed from the Divine side. Let us

look, then, at some of the reasons why God has bidden us to pray.

First and foremost, prayer has been appointed that the Lord God Himself

should be honoured. God requires we should recognise that He is,

indeed, "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity" (Isa. 57:15).

God requires that we shall own His universal dominion: in petitioning

God for rain Elijah did but confess His control over the elements; in

praying to God to deliver a poor sinner from the wrath to come we

acknowledge that "salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9); in

supplicating His blessing on the Gospel unto the uttermost parts of the

earth we declare His rulership over the whole world.

Again; God requires that we shall worship Him, and prayer, real prayer,

is an act of worship. Prayer is an act of worship inasmuch as it is the

prostrating of the soul before Him; inasmuch as it is a calling upon

His great and holy name; inasmuch as it is the owning of His goodness,

His power, His immutability, His grace, and inasmuch as it is the

recognition of His Sovereignty, owned by a submission to His will. It

is highly significant to notice in this connection that the Temple

wasn't termed by Christ the House of Sacrifice, but instead, the House

of Prayer.

Again; prayer redounds to God's glory, for in prayer we do but

acknowledge dependency upon Him. When we humbly supplicate the Divine

Being we cast ourselves upon His power and mercy. In seeking blessings

from God we own that He is the Author and Fountain of every good and

perfect gift. That prayer brings glory to God is further seen from the

fact that prayer calls faith into exercise, and nothing from us is so

honouring and pleasing to Him as the confidence of our hearts.

In the second place, prayer is appointed by God for our spiritual

blessing, as a means for our growth in grace. When seeking to learn the

design of prayer, this should ever occupy us before we regard prayer as

a means for obtaining the supply of our need. Prayer is designed by God

for our humbling. Prayer, real prayer, is a coming into the Presence of

God, and a sense of His awful majesty produces a realisation of our

nothingness and unworthiness. Again; prayer is designed by God for the

exercise of our faith. Faith is begotten in the Word (Rom. 10:8), but

it is exercised in prayer; hence, we read of "the prayer of faith."

Again; prayer calls love into action. Concerning the hypocrite the

question is asked, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he

always call upon God?" (Job 27:10). But they that love the Lord cannot

be long away from Him, for they delight in unburdening themselves to

Him. Not only does prayer call love into action but through the direct

answers vouchsafed to our prayers our love to God is increased-"I love

the LORD, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications" (Psa.

116:1). Again; prayer is designed by God to teach us the value of the

blessings we have sought from Him, and it causes us to rejoice the more

when He has bestowed upon us that for which we supplicate Him.

Third, prayer is appointed by God for our seeking from Him the things

which we are in need of. But here a difficulty may present itself to

those who have read carefully the previous chapters of this book. If

God has foreordained, before the foundation of the world, everything

which happens in time, what is the use of prayer? If it is true that

"of Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Rom. 11:30), then

why pray? Ere replying directly to these queries it should be pointed

out how that there is just as much reason to ask, What is the use of me

coming to God and telling Him what He already knows? Wherein is the use

of me spreading before Him my need, seeing He is already acquainted

with it? as there is to object, What is the use of praying for anything

when everything has been ordained beforehand by God? Prayer is not for

the purpose of informing God, as if He were ignorant (the Saviour

expressly declared "for your Father knoweth what things ye have need

of, before ye ask Him"-Matt. 6:8), but it is to acknowledge He does

know what we are in need of. Prayer is not appointed for the furnishing

of God with the knowledge of what we need, but is designed as a

confession to Him of our sense of need. In this, as in everything,

God's thoughts are not as ours. God requires that His gifts should be

sought for. He designs to be honoured by our asking, just as He is to

be thanked by us after He has bestowed His blessing.

However, the question still returns on us, If God be the Predestinator

of everything that comes to pass, and the Regulator of all events, then

is not prayer a profitless exercise? A sufficient answer to these

questions is that God bids us to pray, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess.

5:17). And again, "men ought always to pray" (Luke 18:1). And further:

Scripture declares that "the prayer of faith shall save the sick," and

"the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James

5:15, 16); while the Lord Jesus Christ, our perfect Example in all

things, was pre-eminently a Man of Prayer. Thus, it is evident, that

prayer is neither meaningless nor valueless. But still this does not

remove the difficulty nor answer the question with which we started

out. What then is the relationship between God's Sovereignty and

Christian prayer?

First of all, we would say with emphasis, that prayer is not intended

to change God's purpose, nor is it to move Him to form fresh purposes.

God has decreed that certain events shall come to pass through the

means He has appointed for their accomplishment. God has elected

certain ones to be saved, but He has also decreed that these shall be

saved through the preaching the Gospel. The Gospel, then, is one of the

appointed means for the working out of the eternal counsel of the Lord;

and prayer is another. God has decreed the means as well as the end,

and among the means is prayer. Even the prayers of His people are

included in His eternal decrees. Therefore, instead of prayers being in

vain they are among the means through which God exercises His decrees.

"If indeed all things happen by a blind chance, or a fatal necessity

prayers in that case could be of no moral efficacy, and of no use; but

since they are regulated by the direction of Divine wisdom, prayers

have a place in the order of events" (Haldane).

That prayers for the execution of the very things decreed by God are

not meaningless is clearly taught in the Scriptures. Elijah knew that

God was about to give rain, but that did not prevent him from at once

betaking himself to prayer (James 5:17, 18). Daniel "understood" by the

writings of the prophets that the captivity was to last but seventy

years, yet when these seventy years were almost ended we are told that

he set his face "unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and

supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (Dan. 9:2, 3).

God told the prophet Jeremiah "For I know the thoughts that I think

toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give

you an expected end"; but instead of adding, there is, therefore, no

need for you to supplicate Me for these things, He said, "Then shall ye

call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto

you" (Jer. 29:11, 12).

Here then is the design of prayer: not that God's will may be altered,

but that it may be accomplished in His own good time and way. It is

because God has promised certain things that we can ask for them with

the full assurance of faith. It is God's purpose that His will shall be

brought about by His own appointed means, and that He may do His people

good upon His own terms, and that is, by the 'means' and 'terms' of

entreaty and supplication. Did not the Son of God know for certain that

after His death and resurrection He would be exalted by the Father.

Assuredly He did. Yet we find Him asking for this very thing: "O

Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine Own Self with the glory which I had

with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5)! Did not He know that none

of His people could perish? yet He besought the Father to "keep" them

(John 17:11)!

Finally, it should be said that God's will is immutable, and cannot be

altered by our cryings. When the mind of God is not toward a people to

do them good, it cannot be turned to them by the most fervent and

importunate prayer of those who have the greatest interest in Him:

"Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me,

yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight,

and let them go forth" (Jer. 15:1). The prayers of Moses to enter the

promised land is a parallel case.

Our views respecting prayer need to be revised and brought into harmony

with the teaching of Scripture on the subject. The prevailing idea

seems to be that I come to God and ask Him for something that I want,

and that I expect Him to give me that which I have asked. But this is a

most dishonouring and degrading conception. The popular belief reduces

God to a servant, our servant: doing our bidding, performing our

pleasure, granting our desires. No; prayer is a coming to God, telling

Him my need, committing my way unto the Lord, and leaving Him to deal

with it as seemeth Him best. This makes my will subject to His, instead

of, as in the former case, seeking to bring His will into subjection to

mine. No prayer is pleasing to God unless the spirit actuating it is

"not my will, but Thine be done." "When God bestows blessings on a

praying people, it is not for the sake of their prayers, as if He was

inclined and turned by them; but it is for His own sake, and of His own

Sovereign will and pleasure. Should it be said, to what purpose then is

prayer? it is answered, This is the way and means God has appointed for

the communication of the blessing of His goodness to His people. For

though He has purposed, provided, and promised them, yet He will be

sought unto, to give them, and it is a duty and privilege to ask. When

they are blessed with a spirit of prayer it forebodes well, and looks

as if God intended to bestow the good things asked, which should be

asked always with submission to the will of God, saying, Not my will

but Thine be done" (John Gill).

The distinction just noted above is of great practical importance for

our peace of heart. Perhaps the one thing that exercises Christians as

much as anything else is that of unanswered prayers. They have asked

God for something: so far as they are able to judge they have asked in

faith believing they would receive that for which they had supplicated

the Lord: and they have asked earnestly and repeatedly, but the answer

has not come. The result is that, in many cases, faith in the efficacy

of prayer becomes weakened, until hope gives way to despair and the

closet is altogether neglected. Is it not so?

Now will it surprise our readers when we say that every real prayer of

faith that has ever been offered to God has been answered? Yet we

unhesitatingly affirm it. But in saying this we must refer back to our

definition of prayer. Let us repeat it. Prayer is a coming to God,

telling Him my need (or the need of others), committing my way unto the

Lord, and then leaving Him to deal with the case as seemeth Him best.

This leaves God to answer the prayer in whatever way He sees fit, and

often, His answer may be the very opposite of what would be most

acceptable to the flesh; yet, if we have really LEFT our need in His

hands it will be His answer, nevertheless. Let us look at two examples.

In John 11 we read of the sickness of Lazarus. The Lord "loved" him,

but He was absent from Bethany. The sisters sent a messenger unto the

Lord acquainting Him of their brother's condition. And note

particularly how their appeal was worded-"Lord, behold, he whom Thou

lovest is sick." That was all. They did not ask Him to heal Lazarus.

They did not request Him to hasten at once to Bethany. They simply

spread their need before Him, committed the case into His hands, and

left Him to act as He deemed best! And what was our Lord's reply? Did

He respond to their appeal and answer their mute request? Certainly He

did, though not, perhaps, in the way they had hoped. He answered by

abiding "two days still in the same place where He was" (John 11:6),

and allowing Lazarus to die! But in this instance that was not all.

Later, He journeyed to Bethany and raised Lazarus from the dead. Our

purpose in referring here to this case is to illustrate the proper

attitude for the believer to take before God in the hour of need. The

next example will emphasise rather, God's method of responding to His

needy child.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 12. The Apostle Paul had been accorded an

unheard-of privilege. He had been transported into Paradise. His ears

had listened to and his eyes had gazed upon that which no other mortal

had heard or seen this side of death. The wondrous revelation was more

than the Apostle could endure. He was in danger of becoming "puffed up"

by his extraordinary experience. Therefore, a thorn in the flesh, the

messenger of Satan, was sent to buffet him lest he be exalted above

measure. And the Apostle spreads his need before the Lord; he thrice

beseeches Him that this thorn in the flesh should be removed. Was his

prayer answered? Assuredly, though not in the manner he had desired.

The "thorn" was not removed but grace was given to bear it. The burden

was not lifted but strength was vouchsafed to carry it.

Does someone object that it is our privilege to do more than spread our

need before God? Are we reminded that God has, as it were, given us a

blank check and invited us to fill it in? Is it said that the promises

of God are all-inclusive, and that we may ask God for what we will? If

so, we must call attention to the fact that it is necessary to compare

Scripture with Scripture if we are to learn the full mind of God on any

subject, and that as this is done we discover God has qualified the

promises given to praying souls by saying "If ye ask anything according

to His will He heareth us" (1 John 5:14). Real prayer is communion with

God so that there will be common thoughts between His mind and ours.

What is needed is for Him to fill our hearts with His thoughts and then

His desires will become our desires flowing back to Him. Here then is

the meeting-place between God's Sovereignty and Christian prayer: If we

ask anything according to His will He heareth us, and if we do not so

ask He does not hear us; as saith the Apostle James, "Ye ask, and

receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your

lusts" or desires (4:3).

But did not the Lord Jesus tell His disciples, "Verily, verily, I say

unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give

it you" (John 16:23)? He did; but this promise does not give praying

souls carte blanche. These words of our Lord are in perfect accord with

those of the Apostle John: "If ye ask anything according to His will He

heareth us." What is it to ask "in the name of Christ"? Surely it is

very much more than a prayer formula, the mere concluding of our

supplications with the words "in the name of Christ." To apply to God

for anything in the name of Christ, it must needs be in keeping with

what Christ is! To ask God in the name of Christ is as though Christ

Himself were the suppliant. We can only ask God for what Christ would

ask. To ask in the name of Christ is therefore to set aside our own

wills, accepting God's!

Let us now amplify our definition of prayer. What is prayer? Prayer is

not so much an act as it is an attitude-an attitude of dependency,

dependency upon God. Prayer is a confession of creature weakness, yea,

of helplessness. Prayer is the acknowledgement of our need and the

spreading of it before God. We do not say that this is all there is in

prayer, it is not: but it is the essential, the primary element in

prayer. We freely admit that we are quite unable to give a complete

definition of prayer within the compass of a brief sentence, or in any

number of words. Prayer is both an attitude and an act, an human act,

and yet there is the Divine element in it too, and it is this which

makes an exhaustive analysis impossible as well as impious to attempt.

But admitting this, we do insist again that prayer is fundamentally an

attitude of dependency upon God. Therefore, prayer is the very opposite

of dictating to God. Because prayer is an attitude of dependency, the

one who really prays is submissive, submissive to the Divine will; and

submission to the Divine will means that we are content for the Lord to

supply our need according to the dictates of His own Sovereign

pleasure. And hence it is that we say every prayer that is offered to

God in this spirit is sure of meeting with an answer or response from

Him.

Here then is the reply to our opening question, and the scriptural

solution to the seeming difficulty. Prayer is not the requesting of God

to alter His purpose or for Him to form a new one. Prayer is the taking

of an attitude of dependency upon God, the spreading of our need before

Him, the asking for those things which are in accordance with His will,

and therefore there is nothing whatever inconsistent between Divine

Sovereignty and Christian prayer.

In closing this chapter we would utter a word of caution to safeguard

the reader against drawing a false conclusion from what has been said.

We have not here sought to epitomise the whole teaching of Scripture on

the subject of prayer, nor have we even attempted to discuss in general

the problem of prayer; instead, we have confined ourselves, more or

less, to a consideration of the relationship between God's Sovereignty

and Christian prayer. What we have written is intended chiefly as a

protest against much of the modern teaching, which so stresses the

human element in prayer that the Divine side is almost entirely lost

sight of.

In Jeremiah 10:23 we are told "It is not in man that walketh to direct

his steps" (cf. Prov. 16:9); and yet in many of his prayers man impulse

presumes to direct the Lord as to His way, and as to what He ought to

do: even implying that if only he had the direction of the affairs of

the world and of the church he would soon have things very different

from what they are. This cannot be denied: for anyone with any

spiritual discernment at all could not fail to detect this spirit in

many of our modern prayer-meetings where the flesh holds sway. How slow

we all are to learn the lesson that the haughty creature needs to be

brought down to his knees and humbled into the dust. And this is where

the very act of prayer is intended to put us. But man (in his usual

perversity) turns the footstool into a throne from whence he would fain

direct the Almighty as to what He ought to do! giving the onlooker the

impression that if God had half the compassion that those who pray (?)

have, all would quickly be right! Such is the arrogance of the old

nature even in a child of God.

Our main purpose in this chapter has been to emphasise the need for

submitting, in prayer, our wills to God's. But it must also be added

that prayer is much more than a pious exercise, and far otherwise than

a mechanical performance. Prayer is, indeed, a Divinely appointed means

whereby we may obtain from God the things we ask, providing we ask for

those things which are in accord with His will. These pages will have

been penned in vain unless they lead both writer and reader to cry with

a deeper earnestness than heretofore, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke

11:1).

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CHAPTER TEN

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD HIS SOVEREIGNTY

"Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight"

(Matt. 11:26).

In the present chapter we shall consider, somewhat briefly, the

practical application to ourselves of the great truth which we have

pondered in its various ramifications in earlier pages. In chapter

twelve we shall deal more in detail with the value of this doctrine but

here we would confine ourselves to a definition of what ought to be our

attitude toward the Sovereignty of God.

Every truth that is revealed to us in God's Word is there not only for

our information but also for our inspiration. The Bible has been given

to us not to gratify an idle curiosity but to edify the souls of its

readers. The Sovereignty of God is something more than an abstract

principle which explains the rationale of the Divine government: it is

designed as a motive for godly fear, it is made known to us for the

promotion of righteous living, it is revealed in order to bring into

subjection our rebellious hearts. A true recognition of God's

Sovereignty humbles as nothing else does or can humble, and brings the

heart into lowly submission before God, causing us to relinquish our

own self-will and making us delight in the perception and performance

of the Divine will.

When we speak of the Sovereignty of God we mean very much more than the

exercise of God's governmental power, though, of course, that is

included in the expression. As we have remarked in an earlier chapter,

the Sovereignty of God means the Godhood of God. In its fullest and

deepest meaning the title of this book signifies the Character and

Being of the One whose pleasure is performed and whose will is

executed. To truly recognise the Sovereignty of God is, therefore, to

gaze upon the Sovereign Himself. It is to come into the presence of the

august "Majesty on high." It is to have a sight of the thrice holy God

in His excellent glory. The effects of such a sight may be learned from

those Scriptures which describe the experience of different ones who

obtained a view of the Lord God.

Mark the experience of Job-the one of whom the Lord Himself said "There

is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that

feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8). At the close of the book

which bears his name we are shown Job in the Divine presence, and how

does he carry himself when brought face to face with Jehovah? Hear what

he says: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine

eye seeth Thee: Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes"

(Job 42:5, 6). Thus, a sight of God, God revealed in awesome majesty,

caused Job to abhor himself, and not only so, but to abase himself

before the Almighty.

Take note of Isaiah. In the sixth chapter of his prophecy a scene is

brought before us which has few equals even in Scripture. The prophet

beholds the Lord upon the Throne, a Throne "high and lifted up." Above

this Throne stood the seraphims with veiled faces, crying, "Holy, holy,

holy, is the Lord of hosts." What is the effect of this sight upon the

prophet? We read "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am

a man of unclean lips:... for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of

hosts" (Isa. 6:5). A sight of the Divine King humbled Isaiah into the

dust, bringing him, as it did, to a realisation of his own nothingness.

One more. Look at the prophet Daniel. Toward the close of his life this

man of God beheld the Lord in theophanic manifestation. He appeared to

His servant in human form "clothed in linen" and with loins "girded

with fine gold," symbolic of holiness and Divine glory. We read that

"His body also was like the beryl, and His face as the appearance of

lightning, and His eyes as lamps of fire, and His arms and His feet

like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of His words like the

voice of a multitude." Daniel then tells the effect this vision had

upon him and those who were with him: "And I Daniel alone saw the

vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great

quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore

I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no

strength in me:for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and

I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of His words: and when I

heard the voice of His words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face,

and my face toward the ground" (Dan. 10:6-9). Once more, then, we are

shown that to obtain a sight of the Sovereign God is for creature

strength to wither up, and results in man being humbled into the dust

before his Maker. What then ought to be our attitude toward the Supreme

Sovereign? We reply,

1. ONE OF GODLY FEAR.

Why is it that, today, the masses are so utterly unconcerned about

spiritual and eternal things, and that they are lovers of pleasure more

than lovers of God? Why is it that even on the battlefields multitudes

were so indifferent to their soul's welfare? Why is it that defiance of

Heaven is becoming more open, more blatant, more daring? The answer is,

Because "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18). Again;

why is it that the authority of the Scriptures has been lowered so

sadly of late? Why is it that even among those who profess to be the

Lord's people there is so little real subjection to His Word, and that

its precepts are so lightly esteemed and so readily set aside? Ah! what

needs to be stressed today is that God is a God to be feared.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). Happy

the soul that has been awed by a view of God's majesty, that has had a

vision of God's awful greatness, His ineffable holiness, His perfect

righteousness, His irresistible power, His Sovereign grace. Does

someone say, "But it is only the unsaved, those outside of Christ, who

need to fear God"? Then the sufficient answer is that the saved, those

who are in Christ, are admonished to work out their own salvation with

"fear and trembling." Time was when it was the general custom to speak

of a believer as a "God-fearing man"-that such an appellation has

become nearly extinct only serves to show whither we have drifted.

Nevertheless, it still stands written "Like as a father pitieth his

children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear Him" (Psa. 103:13)!

When we speak of godly fear, of course, we do not mean a servile fear,

such as prevails among the heathen in connection with their gods. No;

we mean that spirit which Jehovah is pledged to bless, that spirit to

which the prophet referred when he said "To this man will I (the Lord)

look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth

at My Word" (Isa. 66:2). It was this the Apostle had in view when he

wrote, "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the

king" (1 Peter 2:17). And nothing will foster this godly fear like a

recognition of the Sovereign Majesty of God.

What ought to be our attitude toward the Sovereignty of God? We answer

again,

2. ONE OF IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE.

A sight of God leads to a realisation of our littleness and nothingness

and issues in a sense of dependency and of casting ourselves upon God.

Or, again; a view of the Divine Majesty promotes the spirit of godly

fear and this, in turn, begets an obedient walk. Here then is the

Divine antidote for the native evil of our hearts. Naturally, man is

filled with a sense of his own importance, with his greatness and

self-sufficiency; in a word, with pride and rebellion. But, as we

remarked, the great corrective is to behold the Mighty God, for this

alone will really humble him. Man will glory either in himself or in

God. Man will live either to serve and please himself, or he will seek

to serve and please the Lord. None can serve two masters.

Irreverence begets disobedience. Said the haughty monarch of Egypt "Who

is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not

the LORD; neither will I let Israel go" (Exo. 5:2). To Pharaoh, the God

of the Hebrews was merely a god, one among many, a powerless entity who

needed not to be feared or served. How sadly mistaken he was, and how

bitterly he had to pay for his mistake he soon discovered; but what we

are here seeking to emphasise is that Pharaoh's defiant spirit was the

fruit of irreverence, and this irreverence was the consequence of his

ignorance of the majesty and authority of the Divine Being.

Now if irreverence begets disobedience, true reverence will produce and

promote obedience. To realise that the Holy Scriptures are a revelation

from the Most High, communicating to us His mind and defining for us

His will, is the first step toward practical godliness. To recognise

that the Bible is God's Word, and that its precepts are the precepts of

the Almighty, will lead us to see what an awful thing it is to despise

and ignore them. To receive the Bible as addressed to our own souls,

given to us by the Creator Himself, will cause us to cry with the

Psalmist, "Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies...Order my steps in

Thy Word" (Psa. 119: 36, 133). Once the Sovereignty of the Author of

the Word is apprehended it will not longer be a matter of picking and

choosing from the precepts and statutes of that Word, selecting those

which meet with our approval; but it will be seen that nothing less

than an unqualified and whole-hearted submission becomes the creature.

What ought to be our attitude toward the Sovereignty of God?

3. ONE OF ENTIRE RESIGNATION.

A true recognition of God's Sovereignty will exclude all murmuring.

This is self-evident, yet the thought deserves to be dwelt upon. It is

natural to murmur against afflictions and losses. It is natural to

complain when we are deprived of those thing upon which we had set our

hearts. We are apt to regard our possessions as ours unconditionally.

We feel that when we have prosecuted our plans with prudence and

diligence that we are entitled to success; that when by dint of hard

work we have accumulated a 'competence' we deserve to keep and enjoy

it; that when we are surrounded by a happy family no power may lawfully

enter the charmed circle and strike down a loved one; and if in any of

these cases disappointment, bankruptcy, death, actually comes, the

perverted instinct of the human heart is to cry out against God. But in

the one who, by grace, has recognised God's Sovereignty, such murmuring

is silenced, and instead, there is a bowing to the Divine will and an

acknowledgement that He has not afflicted us as sorely as we deserve.

A true recognition of God's Sovereignty will avow God's perfect right

to do with us as He wills. The one who bows to the pleasure of the

Almighty will acknowledge His absolute right to do with us as seemeth

Him good. If He chooses to send poverty, sickness, domestic

bereavements, even while the heart is bleeding at every pore, it will

say, Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right! Often there will be

a struggle, for the carnal mind remains in the believer to the end of

his earthly pilgrimage. But though there may be a conflict within his

breast, nevertheless, to the one who has really yielded himself to this

blessed truth there will presently be heard that Voice saying, as of

old it said to the turbulent Gennesareth, "Peace be still"; and the

tempestuous flood within will be quieted and the subdued soul will lift

a tearful but confident eye to Heaven and say, "Thy will be done."

A striking illustration of a soul bowing to the Sovereign will of God

is furnished by the history of Eli the high priest of Israel. In 1

Samuel 3 we learn how God revealed to the young child Samuel that He

was about to slay Eli's two sons for their wickedness, and on the

morrow Samuel communicates this message to the aged priest. It is

difficult to conceive of more appalling intelligence for the heart of a

pious parent. The announcement that his child is going to be stricken

down by sudden death is, under any circumstances, a great trial to any

father, but to learn that his two sons-in the prime of their manhood,

and utterly unprepared to die-were to be cut off by a Divine judgement

must have been overwhelming. Yet, what was the effect upon Eli when he

learned from Samuel the tragic tidings? What reply did he make when he

heard the awful news? "And he said, It is the LORD: let Him do what

seemeth Him good" (1 Sam. 3:18). And not another word escaped him.

Wonderful submission! Sublime resignation! Lovely exemplification of

the power of Divine grace to control the strongest affections of the

human heart and subdue the rebellious will, bringing it into unrepining

acquiescence to the Sovereign pleasure of Jehovah.

Another example, equally striking, is seen in the life of Job. As is

well known, Job was one that feared God and eschewed evil. If ever

there was one who might reasonably expect Divine providence to smile

upon him-we speak as a man-it was Job. Yet, how fared it with him? For

a time the lines fell unto him in pleasant places. The Lord filled his

quiver by giving him seven sons and three daughters. He prospered him

in his temporal affairs until he owned great possessions. But of a

sudden the sun of life was hidden behind dark clouds. In a single day

Job lost not only his flocks and herds but his sons and daughters as

well. News arrived that his cattle had been carried off by robbers, and

his children slain by a cyclone. And how did he receive this

intelligence? Hearken to his sublime words: "The LORD gave, and the

LORD hath taken away." He bowed to the Sovereign will of Jehovah. He

traced his afflictions back to their First Cause. He looked behind the

Sabeans who had stolen his cattle, and beyond the winds that had

destroyed his children, and saw the hand of God. But not only did Job

recognise God's Sovereignty, he rejoiced in it, too. To the words, "The

LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away," he added, "blessed be the

name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Again we say, Sweet submission! Sublime

resignation!

A true recognition of God's Sovereignty causes us to hold our every

plan in abeyance to God's will. The writer well recalls an incident

which occurred in England over twenty years ago. Queen Victoria was

dead, and the date for the coronation of her eldest son, Edward, had

been set for April 1902. In all the announcements which were sent out,

two little letters were omitted, D. V.-Deo Volente: God willing. Plans

were made and all arrangements completed for the most imposing

celebrations that England had ever witnessed. Kings and emperors from

all parts of the earth had received invitations to attend the royal

ceremony. The Prince's proclamations were printed and displayed, but,

so far as the writer is aware, the letters D. V. were not found on a

single one of them. A most imposing program had been arranged, and the

late Queen's eldest son was to be crowned Edward the Seventh at

Westminster Abbey at a certain hour on a fixed day. And then God

intervened and all man's plans were frustrated. A still small voice was

heard to say, "You have reckoned without Me," and Prince Edward was

stricken down with appendicitis, and his coronation postponed for

months!

As remarked, a true recognition of God's Sovereignty causes us to hold

our plan in abeyance to God's will. It makes us recognise that the

Divine Potter has absolute power over the clay and moulds it according

to his own imperial pleasure. It causes us to heed that admonition-now,

alas! so generally disregarded-"Go to now, ye that say, Today or

tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and

buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the

morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for

a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If

the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:13-15).

Yes, it is to the Lord's will we must bow. It is for Him to say where I

shall live, whether in America or Africa. It is for Him to determine

under what circumstances I shall live, whether amid wealth or poverty,

whether in health or sickness. It is for Him to say how long I shall

live, whether I shall be cut down in youth like the flower of the

field, or whether I shall continue for three score and ten years. To

really learn this lesson is, by grace, to attain unto a high form in

the school of God, and even when we think we have learned it we

discover, again and again, that we have to relearn it.

What ought to be our attitude toward the Sovereignty of God?

4. ONE OF DEEP THANKFULNESS AND JOY.

The heart's apprehension of this most blessed truth of the Sovereignty

of God produces something far different than a sullen bowing to the

inevitable. The philosophy of this perishing world knows nothing better

than to "make the best of a bad job." But with the Christian it should

be far otherwise. Not only should the recognition of God's supremacy

beget within us godly fear, implicit obedience, and entire resignation,

but it should cause us to say with the Psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O my

soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name." Does not the

Apostle say, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the

Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20)? Ah! it is at

this point the state of our souls is so often put to the test. Alas,

there is so much self-will in each of us. When things go as we wish

them we appear to be very grateful to God; but what of those occasions

when things go contrary to our plans and desires?

We take it for granted when the real Christian takes a train-journey

that, upon reaching his destination, he devoutly returns thanks unto

God-which, of course, argues that He controls everything; otherwise, we

ought to thank the engine-driver, the stoker, the signalmen, etc. Or,

if in business, at the close of a good week, gratitude is expressed

unto the Giver of every good (temporal) and every perfect (spiritual)

gift-which again, argues that He directs all customers to your shop. So

far, so good. Such examples occasion no difficulty. But imagine the

opposites. Suppose my train was delayed for hours, did I fret and fume;

suppose another train ran into it and I am injured! Or, suppose I have

had a poor week in business, or that lightning struck my shop and set

it on fire, or that burglars broke in and rifled it, then what: do I

see the hand of God in these things?

Take the case of Job once more. When loss after loss came his way what

did he do? Bemoan his "bad luck"? Curse the robbers? Murmur against

God? No; he bowed before Him in worship. Ah! dear reader, there is no

real rest for your poor heart until you learn to see the hand of God in

everything. But for that, faith must be in constant exercise. And what

is faith? A blind credulity? A fatalistic acquiescence? No, far from

it. Faith is a resting on the sure Word of the living God, and

therefore says "We know that all things work together for good to them

that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose"

(Rom. 8:28); and therefore faith will give thanks "always for all

things." Operative faith will "Rejoice in the Lord alway" (Phil. 4:4).

We turn now to mark how this recognition of God's Sovereignty which is

expressed in godly fear, implicit obedience, entire resignation, and

deep thankfulness and joy was supremely and perfectly exemplified by

the Lord Jesus Christ.

In all things the Lord Jesus has left us an example that we should

follow His steps. But is this true in connection with the first point

made above? Are the words "godly fear" ever linked with His peerless

name? Remembering that "godly fear" signifies not a servile terror, but

rather a filial subjection and reverence, and remembering too that "the

fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," would it not rather be

strange if no mention at all were made of "godly fear" in connection

with the One who was wisdom incarnate! What a wonderful and precious

word is that of Hebrews 5:7-"Who in the days of His flesh, having

offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto

Him that was able to save Him from death, and having been heard for His

godly fear" (R. V.). What was it but "godly fear" which caused the Lord

Jesus to be "subject" unto Mary and Joseph in the days of His

childhood? Was it "godly fear"-a filial subjection to and reverence for

God-that we see displayed when we read "And He came to Nazareth where

He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the

synagogue on the Sabbath day" (Luke 4:16)? Was it not "godly fear"

which caused the incarnate Son to say, when tempted by Satan to fall

down and worship him, "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy

God, and Him only shalt thou serve"? Was it not "godly fear" which

moved Him to say to the cleansed leper, "Go thy way, show thyself to

the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded" (Matt. 8:4)? But

why multiply illustrations? [12]

How perfect was the obedience that the Lord Jesus offered to God the

Father! And in reflecting upon this let us not lose sight of that

wondrous grace which caused Him, who was in the very form of God, to

stoop so low as to take upon Him the form of a Servant and thus be

brought into the place where obedience was becoming. As the perfect

Servant He yielded complete obedience to His Father. How absolute and

entire that obedience was we may learn from the words He "became

obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross" (Phil. 2:8). That

this was a conscious and intelligent obedience is clear from His own

language: "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My

life, that I might take it again. No man taketh if from Me, but I lay

it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take

it again. This commandment have I received from My Father" (John 10:17,

18).

And what shall we say of the absolute resignation of the Son to the

Father's will? what, but, between Them there was entire oneness of

accord. Said He, "For I came down from Heaven, not to do Mine own will,

but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38), and how fully He

substantiated that claim all know who have attentively followed His

path as marked out in the Scriptures. Behold Him in Gethsemane! The

bitter 'cup,' held in the Father's hand, is presented to His view. Mark

well His attitude. Learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart.

Remember that there in the Garden we see the Word become flesh, a

perfect Man. His body is quivering at every nerve in contemplation of

the physical sufferings which await Him; His holy and sensitive nature

is shrinking from the horrible indignities which shall be heaped upon

Him; His heart is breaking at the awful "reproach" which is before Him;

His spirit is greatly troubled as He foresees the terrible conflict

with the Power of Darkness; and above all, and supremely, His soul is

filled with horror at the thought of being separated from God

Himself-thus and there He pours out His soul to the Father, and with

strong crying and tears He sheds, as it were, great drops of blood. And

now observe and listen. Still the beating of thy heart and hearken to

the words which fall from His blessed lips-"Father, if Thou be willing,

remove this cup from Me: nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done"

(Luke 22:42). Here is submission personified. Here is resignation to

the pleasure of a Sovereign God superlatively exemplified. And He has

left us an example that we should follow His steps. He who was God

became man, and was tempted in all points like as we are, sin apart, to

show us how to wear our creature nature!

Above we asked, What shall we say of Christ's absolute resignation to

the Father's will? We answer further, This, that here, as everywhere,

He was unique, peerless. In all things He has the pre-eminence. In the

Lord Jesus there was no rebellious will to be broken. In His heart

there was nothing to be subdued. Was not this one reason why, in the

language of prophecy, He said, "I am a worm, and no man" (Psa. 22:6)-a

worm has no power of resistance! It was because in Him there was no

resistance that He could say, "My meat is to do the will of Him that

sent Me" (John 4:34). Yea, it was because He was in perfect accord with

the Father in all things that He said, "I delight to do Thy will, O

God; yea, Thy law is within My heart" (Psa. 40:8). Note the last clause

here and behold His matchless excellency. God has to put His laws into

our minds, and write them in our hearts (see Heb. 8:10), but His law

was already in Christ's heart!

What a beautiful and striking illustration of Christ's thankfulness and

joy is found in Matthew 11. There we behold, first, the failure of the

faith of His forerunner (vv. 22, 23). Next, we learn of the discontent

of the people: satisfied neither with Christ's joyous message, nor with

John's solemn one (vv. 16-20). Third, we have the non-repentance of

those favoured cities in which our Lord's mightiest works were done

(vv. 21-24). And then we read, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I

thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid

these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto

babes" (v. 25)! Note the parallel passage in Luke 10:21 opens by

saying, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank

Thee," etc. Ah! here was submission in its purest form. Here was One by

whom the worlds were made, yet, in the days of His humiliation and in

the face of His rejection, thankfully and joyously bowing to the will

of the "Lord of Heaven and earth."

What ought to be our attitude toward God's Sovereignty? Finally,

5. ONE OF ADORING WORSHIP.

It has been well said that "true worship is based upon recognised

GREATNESS, and greatness is superlatively seen in Sovereignty, and at

no other footstool will men really worship" (J. B. Moody). In the

presence of the Divine King upon His throne even the seraphims 'veil

their faces.'

Divine Sovereignty is not the Sovereignty of a tyrannical Despot, but

the exercised pleasure of One who is infinitely wise and good! Because

God is infinitely wise He cannot err, and because He is infinitely

righteous He will not do wrong. Here then is the preciousness of this

truth. The mere fact itself that God's will is irresistible and

irreversible fills me with fear, but once I realise that God wills only

that which is good my heart is made to rejoice.

Here then is the final answer to the question of this chapter, What

ought to be our attitude toward the Sovereignty of God? The becoming

attitude for us to take is that of godly fear, implicit obedience, and

unreserved resignation and submission. But not only so: the recognition

of the Sovereignty of God, and the realisation that the Sovereign

Himself is my Father, ought to overwhelm the heart and cause me to bow

before Him in adoring worship. At all times I must say "Even so,

Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight." We conclude with an

example which well illustrates our meaning.

Some two hundred years ago the saintly Madam Guyon, after ten years

spent in a dungeon lying far below the surface of the ground, lit only

by a candle at meal-times, wrote these words:

"A little bird I am,

Shut from the fields of air;

Yet in my cage I sit and sing

To Him who placed me there;

Well pleased a prisoner to be,

Because, my God, it pleases Thee.

Nought have I else to do

I sing the whole day long;

And He whom most I love to please,

Doth listen to my song;

He caught and bound my wandering wing

But still He bends to hear me sing.

My cage confines me round;

Abroad I cannot fly;

But though my wing is closely bound,

My heart's at liberty,

My prison walls cannot control

The flight, the freedom of the soul.

Ah! it is good to soar

These bolts and bar above,

To Him whose purpose I adore,

Whose Providence I love;

And in Thy mighty will to find

The joy, the freedom of the mind."

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[12] Note how Old Testament prophecy also declared that "the Spirit of

the Lord" should "rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and

understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge

and of the fear of the Lord" (Isa.11:1,2).

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

DIFFICULTIES AND OBJECTIONS

"Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of

Israel;

Is not My way equal? are not your ways unequal?"

(Ezek. 18:25).

A convenient point has been reached when we may now examine, more

definitely, some of the difficulties encountered and the objections

which might be advanced against what we have written in previous pages.

The author deemed it better to reserve these for a separate

consideration rather than deal with them as he went along, requiring as

that would have done the breaking of the course of thought and

destroying the strict unity of each chapter, or else cumbering our

pages with numerous and lengthy footnotes.

That there are difficulties involved in an attempt to set forth the

truth of God's Sovereignty is readily acknowledged. The hardest thing

of all, perhaps, is to maintain the balance of truth. It is largely a

matter of perspective. That God is Sovereign is explicitly declared in

Scripture: that man is a responsible creature is also expressly

affirmed in Holy Writ. To define the relationship of these two truths,

to fix the dividing line betwixt them, to show exactly where they meet,

to exhibit the perfect consistency of the one with the other, is the

weightiest task of all. Many have openly declared that it is impossible

for the finite mind to harmonise them. Others tell us it is not

necessary or even wise to attempt it. But, as we have remarked in an

earlier chapter, it seems to us more honouring to God to seek in His

Word the solution to every problem. What is impossible to man is

possible with God, and while we grant that the finite mind is limited

in its reach, yet, we remember that the Scriptures are given to us that

the man of God may be "thoroughly furnished," and if we approach their

study in the spirit of humility and of expectancy, then, according unto

our faith will it be unto us.

As remarked above, the hardest task in this connection is to preserve

the balance of truth while insisting on both the Sovereignty of God and

the responsibility of the creature. To some of our readers it may

appear that in pressing the Sovereignty of God to the lengths we have

man is reduced to a mere puppet. Hence, to guard against this, they

would modify their definitions and statements relating to God's

Sovereignty, and thus seek to blunt the keen edge of what is so

offensive to the carnal mind. Others, while refusing to weigh the

evidence that we have adduced in support of our assertions, may raise

objections which to their minds are sufficient to dispose of the whole

subject. We would not waste time in the effort to refute objections

made in a carping and contentious spirit but we are desirous of meeting

fairly the difficulties experienced by those who are anxious to obtain

a fuller knowledge of the truth. Not that we deem ourselves able to

give a satisfactory and final answer to every question that might be

asked. Like the reader, the writer knows but in part and sees through a

glass "darkly." All that we can do is to examine these difficulties in

the light we now have, in dependence upon the Spirit of God that we may

follow on to know the Lord better.

We propose now to retrace our steps and pursue the same order of

thought as that followed up to this point. As a part of our

"definition" of God's Sovereignty we affirmed: "To say that God is

Sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all

power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart

His purpose, or resist His will... The Sovereignty of the God of

Scripture is absolute, irresistible, infinite." To put it now in its

strongest form, we insist that God does as He pleases, only as He

pleases, always as He pleases; that whatever takes place in time is but

the outworking of that which He decreed in eternity. In proof of this

assertion we appeal to the following Scripture: "But our God is in the

heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Psa. 115:3). "For

the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and His

hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (Isa. 14:27). "And

all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth

according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants

of the earth: and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What doest

thou?" (Dan. 4:35). "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all

things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

The above declarations are so plain and positive that any comments of

ours upon them would simply be darkening counsel by words without

knowledge. Such express statements as those just quoted are so sweeping

and so dogmatic that all controversy concerning the subject of which

they treat ought for ever to be at an end. Yet, rather than receive

them at their face value, every device of carnal ingenuity is resorted

to so as to neutralise their force. For example, it has been asked, If

what we see in the world today is but the outworking of God's eternal

purpose, if God's counsel is NOW being accomplished, then why did our

Lord teach His disciples to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is

in Heaven"? Is it not a clear implication from these words that God's

will is not now being done on earth? The answer is very simple. The

emphatic word in the above clause is "as." God's will is being done on

earth today, if it is not, then our earth is not subject to God's rule,

and if it is not subject to His rule then He is not, as Scripture

proclaims Him to be, "The Lord of all the earth" (Josh. 3:13). But

God's will is not being done on earth as it is in Heaven. How is God's

will "done in Heaven"?-consciously and joyfully. How is it "done on

earth"? for the most part, unconsciously and sullenly. In Heaven the

angels perform the bidding of their Creator intelligently and gladly,

but on earth the unsaved among men accomplish His will blindly and in

ignorance. As we have said in earlier pages, when Judas betrayed the

Lord Jesus and when Pilate sentenced Him to be crucified they had no

conscious intentions of fulfilling God's decrees yet, nevertheless,

unknown to themselves they did do so!

But again. It has been objected: If everything that happens on earth is

the fulfilling of the Almighty's pleasure, if God has

foreordained-before the foundation of the world-everything which comes

to pass in human history, then why do we read in Genesis 6:6 "It

repented the LORD that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him

at His heart"? Does not this language intimate that the antediluvians

had followed a course which their Maker had not marked out for them,

and that in view of the fact they had "corrupted" their way upon the

earth the Lord regretted that He had ever brought such a creature into

existence? Ere drawing such a conclusion let us note what is involved

in such an inference. If the words "It repented the Lord that He had

made man" are regarded in an absolute sense, then God's omniscience

would be denied, for in such a case the course followed by man must

have been unforeseen by God in the day that He created him. Therefore

it must be evident to every reverent soul that this language bears some

other meaning. We submit that the words "It repented the Lord" is an

accommodation to our finite intelligence, and in saying this we are not

seeking to escape a difficulty or cut a knot, but are advancing an

interpretation which we shall seek to show is in perfect accord with

the general trend of Scripture.

The Word of God is addressed to men, and therefore it speaks the

language of men. Because we cannot rise to God's level He, in grace,

comes down to ours and converses with us in our own speech. The Apostle

Paul tells us of how he was "caught up into Paradise and heard

unspeakable words which it is not possible (margin) to utter" (2 Cor.

12:4). Those on earth could not understand the vernacular of Heaven.

The finite cannot comprehend the Infinite, hence the Almighty deigns to

couch His revelation in terms we may understand. It is for this reason

the Bible contains many anthropomorphisms-i.e., representations of God

in the form of man. God is Spirit, yet the Scriptures speak of Him as

having eyes, ears, nostrils, breath, hands, etc., which is surely an

accommodation of terms brought down to the level of human

comprehension.

Again; we read in Genesis 18:20, 21 "And the LORD said, Because the cry

of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous,

I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according

to the cry of it, which is come up unto Me; and if not, I will know."

Now, manifestly, this is an anthropologism-God speaking in human

language. God knew the conditions which prevailed in Sodom, and His

eyes had witnessed its fearful sins, yet He is pleased to use terms

here that are taken from our own vocabulary.

Again; in Genesis 22:12 we read "And He (God) said, Lay not thine hand

upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that

thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only

son, from Me." Here again, God is speaking in the language of men for

He "knew" before He tested Abram exactly how the patriarch would act.

So too the expression of God so often in Jeremiah (7:13 etc.) of Him

"rising up early" is manifestly an accommodation of terms.

Once more: in the parable of the vineyard Christ Himself represents its

Owner as saying, "Then said the Lord of the vineyard, What shall I do?

I will send My beloved Son: it may be they will reverence Him when they

see Him" (Luke 20:13); and yet, it is certain that God knew perfectly

well that the "husbandman" of the vineyard (the Jews) would not

"reverence His Son" but, instead, would "despise and reject" Him as His

own Word had declared!

In the same way we understand the words of Genesis 6:6-"It repented the

LORD that He had made man on the earth"-as an accommodation of terms to

human comprehension. This verse does not teach that God was confronted

with an unforeseen contingency and therefore regretted that He had made

man, but it expresses the abhorrence of a holy God at the awful

wickedness and corruption into which man had fallen. Should there be

any doubt remaining in the minds of our readers as to the legitimacy

and soundness of our interpretation, a direct appeal to Scripture

should instantly and entirely remove it-"The Strength of Israel (a

Divine title) will not He nor repent: for He is not a man, that He

should repent" (1 Sam. 15:29)! "Every good and perfect gift is from

above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with Whom is no

variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17)!

Careful attention to what we have said above will throw light on

numerous other passages which, if we ignore their figurative character

and fail to note that God applies to Himself human modes of expression,

will be obscure and perplexing. Having commented at such length upon

Genesis 6:6 there will be no need to give such a detailed exposition of

other passages which belong to the same class, yet, for the benefit of

those of our readers who may be anxious for us to examine several other

Scriptures, we turn to one or two more.

One Scripture which we often find cited in order to overthrow the

teaching advanced in this book is our Lord's lament over Jerusalem: "O

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them

which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children

together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye

would not!" (Matt. 23:37). The question is asked, Do not these words

show that the Saviour acknowledged the defeat of His mission, that as a

people the Jews resisted all His gracious overtures toward them? In

replying to this question, it should first be pointed out that our Lord

is here referring not so much to His own mission as He is upbraiding

the Jews for having in all ages rejected His grace-this is clear from

His reference to the "prophets." The Old Testament bears full witness

of how graciously and patiently Jehovah dealt with His people, and with

what extreme obstinacy, from first to last, they refused to be

"gathered" unto Him, and how in the end He abandoned them to follow

their own devices, yet, as the same Scriptures declare, the counsel of

God was not frustrated by their wickedness, for it had been foretold

(and therefore, decreed) by Him: see, for example, 1 Kings 8:33.

Matthew 23:37 may well be compared with Isaiah 65:2 where the Lord

says, "I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people,

which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts."

But, it may be asked, Did God seek to do that which was in opposition

to His own eternal purpose? In words borrowed from Calvin we reply,

"Though to our apprehension the will of God is manifold and various,

yet He does not in Himself will things at variance with each other, but

astonishes our faculties with His various and 'manifold' wisdom,

according to the expression of Paul, till we shall be enabled to

understand that He mysteriously wills what now seems contrary to His

will." As a further illustration of the same principle we would refer

the reader to Isaiah 5:1-4: "Now will I sing to my well Beloved a song

of my Beloved touching His vineyard. My well Beloved hath a vineyard in

a very fruitful hill: And He fenced it, and gathered out the stones

thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine and built a tower in the

midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and He looked that it

should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O

inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt

Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that

I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring

forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes?" Is it not plain from this

language that God reckoned Himself to have done enough for Israel to

warrant an expectation-speaking after the manner of men-of better

returns? Yet, is it not equally evident when Jehovah says here "He

looked that it should bring forth grapes" that He is accommodating

Himself to a form of finite expression? And, so also when He says "What

could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?"

we need to take note that in the previous enumeration of what He had

done-the "fencing" etc.-He refers only to external privileges, means,

and opportunities, which had been bestowed upon Israel, for, of course,

He could even then have taken away from them their stony heart and

given them a new heart, even a heart of flesh, had He so pleased.

Perhaps we should link up with Christ's lament over Jerusalem in

Matthew 23:37, His tears over the City, recorded in Luke 19:41: "He

beheld the city, and wept over it." In the verses which immediately

follow we learn what it was that occasioned His tears: "Saying, if thou

hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which

belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the

days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about

thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side." It was

the prospect of the fearful judgement which Christ knew was impending.

But did those tears make manifest a disappointed God? Nay, verily.

Instead, they displayed a perfect Man. The Man Christ Jesus was no

emotionless stoic, but One "filled with compassion." Those tears

expressed the sinless sympathies of His real and pure humanity. Had He

not "wept" He had been less than human. Those "tears" were one of many

proofs that "in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His

brethren" (Heb. 2:17).

In Chapter One we have affirmed that God is Sovereign in the exercise

of His love, and in saying this we are fully aware that many will

strongly resent the statement and that, furthermore, what we have now

to say will probably meet with more criticism than anything else

advanced in this book. Nevertheless, we must be true to our convictions

of what we believe to be the teaching of Holy Scripture, and we can

only ask our readers to examine diligently in the light of God's Word

what we here submit to their attention.

One of the most popular beliefs of the day is that God loves everybody,

and the very fact that it is so popular with all classes ought to be

enough to arouse the suspicions of those who are subject to the Word of

Truth. God's Love toward all His creatures is the fundamental and

favourite tenet of Universalists, Unitarians, Theosophists, Christian

Scientists, Spiritualists, Russellites, etc. No matter how a man may

live-in open defiance of Heaven, with no concern whatever for his

soul's eternal interests, still less for God's glory, dying, perhaps

with an oath on his lips-notwithstanding, God loves him, we are told.

So widely has this dogma been proclaimed, and so comforting is it to

the heart which is at enmity with God we have little hope of convincing

many of their error. That God loves everybody, is, we may say, quite a

modern belief. The writings of the church fathers, the Reformers or the

Puritans will (we believe) be searched in vain for any such concept.

Perhaps the late D. L. Moody-captivated by Drummond's "The Greatest

Thing in the World"-did more than anyone else in the last century to

popularise this concept.

It has been customary to say God loves the sinner though He hates his

sin. [13] But that is a meaningless distinction. What is there in a

sinner but sin? Is it not true that his "whole head is sick" and his

"whole heart faint," and that "from the sole of the foot even unto the

head there is no soundness" in him? (Isa. 1:5, 6). Is it true that God

loves the one who is despising and rejecting His blessed Son? God is

Light as well as Love, and therefore His love must be a holy love. To

tell the Christ-rejecter that God loves him is to cauterise his

conscience as well as to afford him a sense of security in his sins.

The fact is, the love of God is a truth for the saints only, and to

present it to the enemies of God is to take the children's bread and

cast it to the dogs. With the exception of John 3:16, not once in the

four Gospels do we read of the Lord Jesus, the perfect Teacher, telling

sinners that God loved them! In the book of Acts, which records the

evangelistic labours and messages of the Apostles, God's love is never

referred to at all! But when we come to the Epistles, which are

addressed to the saints, we have a full presentation of this precious

truth-God's love for His own. Let us seek to rightly divide the Word of

God and then we shall not be found taking truths which are addressed to

believers and misapplying them to unbelievers. That which sinners need

to have brought before them is the ineffable holiness, the exacting

righteousness, the inflexible justice and the terrible wrath of God.

Risking the danger of being misunderstood let us say-and we wish we

could say it to every evangelist and preacher in the country-there is

far too much presenting of Christ to sinners today (by those sound in

the faith), and far too little showing sinners their need of Christ,

i.e., their absolutely ruined and lost condition, their imminent and

awful danger of suffering the wrath to come, the fearful guilt resting

upon them in the sight of God: to present Christ to those who have

never been shown their need of Him, seems to us to be guilty of casting

pearls before swine. [14]

If it be true that God loves every member of the human family then why

did our Lord tell His disciples "He that hath My commandments, and

keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be

loved of My Father... If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My

Father will love him" (John 14:21, 23)? Why say "he that loveth Me

shall be loved of My Father" if the Father loves everybody? The same

limitation is found in Proverbs 8:17: "I love them that love Me."

Again; we read, "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity"-not merely the

works of iniquity. Here then is a flat repudiation of present teaching

that, God hates sin but loves the sinner; Scripture says, "Thou hatest

all workers of iniquity" (Psa. 5:5)! "God is angry with the wicked

every day" (Psa. 7:11). "He that believeth not on the Son shall not see

life, but the wrath of God abideth on him"-not "shall abide," but even

now-"abideth on him" (John 3:36). Can God "love" the one on whom His

"wrath" abides? Again; is it not evident that the words "The love of

God which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:39) marks a limitation, both in

the sphere and objects of His love? Again; is it not plain from the

words "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13) that God

does not love everybody? Again; it is written, "For whom the Lord

loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb.

12:6). Does not this verse teach that God's love is restricted to the

members of His own family? If He loves all men without exception then

the distinction and limitation here mentioned is quite meaningless.

Finally, we would ask, Is it conceivable that God will love the damned

in the Lake of Fire? Yet, if He loves them now He will do so then,

seeing that His love knows no change-He is "without variableness or

shadow of turning"!

Turning now to John 3:16, it should be evident from the passages just

quoted that this verse will not bear the construction usually put upon

it. "God so loved the world." Many suppose that this means, The entire

human race. But "the entire human race" includes all mankind from Adam

till the close of earth's history: it reaches backward as well as

forward! Consider, then, the history of mankind before Christ was born.

Unnumbered millions lived and died before the Saviour came to the

earth, lived here "having no hope and without God in the world," and

therefore passed out into an eternity of woe. If God "loved" them,

where is the slightest proof thereof? Scripture declares "Who (God) in

times past (from the tower of Babel till after Pentecost) suffered all

nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16). Scripture declares

that "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge,

God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are

not convenient" (Rom. 1:28). To Israel God said, "You only have I known

of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). In view of these plain

passages who will be so foolish as to insist that God in the past loved

all mankind! The same applies with equal force to the future. Read

through the book of Revelation, noting especially chapters 8 to 19,

where we have described the judgements which will be poured out from

Heaven on this earth. Read of the fearful woes, the frightful plagues,

the vials of God's wrath, which shall be emptied on the wicked.

Finally, read the twentieth chapter of the Revelation, the great white

throne judgement, and see if you can discover there the slightest trace

of love.

But the objector comes back to John 3:16 and says, "World means world."

True, but we have shown that "the world" does not mean the whole human

family. The fact is that "the world" is used in a general way. When the

brethren of Christ said "Show Thyself to the world" (John 7:4), did

they mean "shew Thyself to all mankind"? When the Pharisees said

"Behold, the world is gone after Him" (John 12:19) did they mean that

"all the human family" were flocking after Him? When the Apostle wrote

"Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:8), did he

mean that the faith of the saints at Rome was the subject of

conversation by every man, woman, and child on earth? When Revelation

13:3 informs us that "all the world wondered after the beast," are we

to understand that there will be no exceptions? These, and other

passages which might be quoted, show that the term "the world" often

has a relative rather than an absolute force.

Now the first thing to note in connection with John 3:16 is that our

Lord was there speaking to Nicodemus, a man who believed that God's

mercies were confined to his own nation. Christ there announced that

God's love in giving His Son had a larger object in view, that it

flowed beyond the boundary of Palestine, reaching out to "regions

beyond." In other words, this was Christ's announcement that God had a

purpose of grace toward Gentiles as well as Jews. "God so loved the

world," then, signifies, God's love is international in its scope. But

does this mean that God loves every individual among the Gentiles? Not

necessarily, for as we have seen, the term "world" is general rather

than specific, relative rather than absolute. The term "world" in

itself is not conclusive. To ascertain who are the objects of God's

love other passages where His love is mentioned must be consulted.

In 2 Peter 2:5 we read of "the world of the ungodly." If then, there is

a world of the ungodly there must also be a world of the godly. It is

the latter who are in view in the passages we shall now briefly

consider. "For the bread of God is He which cometh down from Heaven,

and giveth life unto the world" (John 6:33). Now mark it well, Christ

did not say, "offereth life unto the world," but "giveth." What is the

difference between the two terms? This: a thing which is "offered" may

be refused, but a thing "given," necessarily implies its acceptance. If

it is not accepted it is not "given," it is simply proffered. Here,

then, is a Scripture that positively states Christ giveth life

(spiritual, eternal life) "unto the world." Now He does not give

eternal life to the "world of the ungodly" for they will not have it,

they do not want it. Hence, we are obliged to understand the reference

in John 6:33 as being to "the world of the godly," i.e., God's own

people.

One more: in 2 Corinthians 5:19 we read "To wit that God was in Christ,

reconciling the world unto Himself." What is meant by this is clearly

defined in the words immediately following, "not imputing their

trespasses unto them." Here again "the world" cannot mean "the world of

the ungodly," for their "trespasses are imputed" to them, as the

judgement of the Great White Throne will yet show. But 2 Corinthians

5:19 plainly teaches there is a "world" which are "reconciled,"

reconciled unto God because their trespasses are not reckoned to their

account, having been borne by their Substitute. Who then are they? Only

one answer is fairly possible-the world of God's people!

In like manner, the "world" in John 3:16 must, in the final analysis,

refer to the world of God's people. Must we say, for there is no other

alternative solution. It cannot mean the whole human race, for one half

of the race was already in hell when Christ came to earth. It is unfair

to insist that it means every human being now living, for every other

passage in the New Testament where God's love is mentioned limits it to

His own people-search and see! The objects of God's love in John 3:16

are precisely the same as the objects of Christ's love in John 13:1:

"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour

was come, that He should depart out of this world unto the Father,

having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the

end." We may admit that our interpretation of John 3:16 is no novel one

invented by us, but one almost uniformly given by the Reformers and

Puritans, and many others since then. [15]

Coming now to Chapter Three, The Sovereignty of God in Salvation,

innumerable are the questions which might be raised here. It is

strange, yet it is true, that many who acknowledge the Sovereign rule

of God over material things will cavil and quibble when we insist that

God is also Sovereign in the spiritual realm. But their quarrel is with

God and not with us. We have given Scripture in support of everything

advanced in these pages, and if that will not satisfy our readers it is

idle for us to seek to convince them. What we write now is designed for

those who do bow to the authority of Holy Writ, and for their benefit

we propose to examine several other Scriptures which have purposely

been held for this chapter.

Perhaps the one passage which has presented the greatest difficulty to

those who have seen that passage after passage in Holy Writ plainly

teaches the election of a limited number unto salvation is 2 Peter 3:9:

"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to

repentance."

The first thing to be said upon the above passage is that, like all

other Scripture, it must be understood and interpreted in the light of

its context. What we have quoted in the preceding paragraph is only

part of the verse, and the last part if it at that! Surely it must be

allowed by all that the first half of the verse needs to be taken into

consideration. In order to establish what these words are supposed by

many to mean, viz., that the words "any" and "all" are to be received

without any qualification, it must be shown that the context is

referring to the whole human race! If this cannot be shown, if there is

no premise to justify this, then the conclusion also must be

unwarranted. Let us then ponder the first part of the verse.

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise." Note "promise" in the

singular number, not "promises." What promise is in view? The promise

of salvation? Where, in all Scripture, has God ever promised to save

the whole human race! Where indeed? No, the "promise" here referred to

is not about salvation. What then is it? The context tells us.

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers,

walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His

coming?" (vv. 3, 4). The context then refers to God's promise to send

back His beloved Son. But many long centuries have passed and this

promise has not yet been fulfilled. True, but long as the delay may

seem to us, the interval is short in the reckoning of God. As the proof

of this we are reminded "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one

thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a

thousand years as one day" (v. 8). In God's reckoning of time less than

two days have yet passed since He promised to send back Christ.

But more, the delay in the Father sending back His beloved Son is not

only due to no "slackness" on His part, but it is also occasioned by

His "longsuffering." His longsuffering to whom? The verse we are now

considering tells us: "but His longsuffering to us-ward." And whom are

the "us-ward"?-the human race, or God's own people? In the light of the

context this is not an open question upon which each of us is free to

form an opinion. The Holy Spirit has defined it. The opening verse of

the chapter says, "This second Epistle, beloved, I now write unto you."

And again, the verse immediately preceding declares, "But, beloved, be

not ignorant of this one thing etc.," (v. 8). The "us-ward" then are

the "beloved" of God. They to whom this Epistle is addressed are "them

that have obtained (not "exercised," but "obtained" as God's Sovereign

gift)like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and

our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1). Therefore we say there is no

room for a doubt, a quibble or an argument-the "us-ward" are the elect

of God.

Let us now quote the verse as a whole: "The Lord is not slack

concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is

longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that

all should come to repentance." Could anything be clearer? The "any"

that God is not willing should perish are the "us-ward" to whom God is

"longsuffering," the "beloved" of the previous verses. 2 Peter 3:9

means, then, that God will not send back His Son until "the fullness of

the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25). God will not send hack Christ

till that "people" whom He is now "taking out of the Gentiles" (Acts

15:14) are gathered in. God will not send back His Son till the Body of

Christ is complete, and that will not be till the ones whom He has

elected to be saved in this dispensation shall have been brought to

Him. Thank God for His "longsuffering to us-ward." Had Christ come back

twenty years ago the writer had been left behind to perish in His sins.

But that could not be so God graciously delayed the Second Coming. For

the same reason He is still delaying His Advent. His decreed purpose is

that all His elect will come to repentance, and repent they shall. The

present interval of grace will not end until the last of the "other

sheep" of John 10:16 are safely folded-then will Christ return.

In expounding the Sovereignty of God the Spirit in Salvation we have

shown that His power is irresistible, that, by His gracious operations

upon and within them He "compels" God's elect to come to Christ. The

Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit is set forth not only in John 3:8 where

we are told "The wind bloweth where it pleaseth... so is every one that

is born of the Spirit," but is affirmed in other passages as well. In 1

Corinthians 12:11 we read "But all these worketh that one and the

selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." And

again; we read in Acts 16:6, 7 "Now when they had gone throughout

Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy

Spirit to preach the Word in Asia. After they were come to Mysia, they

assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not."Thus we

see how the Holy Spirit interposed His imperial will in opposition to

the determination of the Apostles.

But, it is objected against the assertion that the will and power of

the Holy Spirit are irresistible that here are two passages, one in the

Old Testament and the other in the New, which appear to militate

against such a conclusion. God said of old "My Spirit shall not always

strive with man" (Gen. 6:3), and to the Jews Stephen declared "Ye

stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist

the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets

have not your fathers persecuted?" (Acts 7:51, 52). If then the Jews

"resisted" the Holy Spirit how can we say His power is irresistible?

The answer is found in Nehemiah 9:30 "Many years didst Thou forbear

them, and testifiedest against them by Thy Spirit in Thy prophets:

yetwould they not give ear." It was the external operations of the

Spirit which Israel "resisted." It was the Spirit speaking by and

through the prophets to which they "would not give ear." It was not

anything which the Holy Spirit wrought in them that they "resisted" but

the motives presented to them by the inspired messages of the prophets.

Perhaps it will help the reader to catch our thought better if we

compare Matthew 11:20-24 "Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein

most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto

thee Chorazin," etc. Our Lord here pronounces woe upon these cities for

their failure to repent because of the "mighty works" (miracles) which

He had done in their sight, and not because of any internal operations

of His grace! The same is true of Genesis 6:3. By comparing 1 Peter

3:18-20 it will be seen that it was by and through Noah that God's

Spirit "strove" with the antediluvians. The distinction noted above was

ably summarised by Andrew Fuller (another writer long deceased from

whom our moderns might learn much) thus: "There are two kinds of

influences by which God works on the minds of men. First, That which is

common, and which is effected by the ordinary use of motives presented

to the mind for consideration: Secondly, That which is special and

supernatural. The one contains nothing mysterious, anymore than the

influence of our words and actions on each other; the other is such a

mystery that we know nothing of it but by its effects-The former ought

to be effectual; the latter is so." The work of the Holy Spirit upon or

towards men is always "resisted" by them; His work within is always

successful. What saith the Scriptures? This: "He which hath begun a

good work IN you," will finish it (Phil. 1:6).

The next question to be considered is: Why preach the Gospel to every

creature? If God the Father has predestined only a limited number to be

saved, if God the Son died to effect the salvation of only those given

to Him by the Father, and if God the Spirit is seeking to quicken none

save God's elect, then what is the use of giving the Gospel to the

world at large, and where is the propriety of telling sinners that

"Whosoever believeth in Christ shall not perish but have everlasting

life"?

First; it is of great importance that we should be clear upon the

nature of the Gospel itself. The Gospel is God's good news concerning

Christ and not concerning sinners: "Paul a servant of Jesus Christ,

called to be an Apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God... concerning

His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:1, 3).

God would have proclaimed far and wide the amazing fact that His own

blessed Son "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"

(Phil. 2:8). A universal testimony must be borne to the matchless worth

of the Person and work of Christ. Note the word witness in Matthew

24:14. The Gospel is God's "witness" unto the perfections of His Son.

Mark the words of the Apostle: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of

Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish" (2 Cor. 2:15)!

Concerning the character and contents of the Gospel the utmost

confusion prevails today. The Gospel is not an "offer" to be bandied

around by evangelical peddlers. The Gospel is no mere invitation but a

proclamation, a proclamation concerning Christ; true whether men

believe it or not. No man is asked to believe that Christ died for him

in particular. The Gospel, in brief, is this: Christ died for sinners,

you are a sinner, believe in Christ, and you shall be saved. In the

Gospel God simply announces the terms upon which men may be saved

(namely, repentance and faith) and, indiscriminately, all are commanded

to fulfil them.

Second, repentance and remission of sins are to be preached in the name

of the Lord Jesus "among all the nations" (Luke 24:47), because God's

elect are "scattered abroad" (John 11:52) among all nations, and it is

by the preaching and hearing of the Gospel that they are called out of

the world. The Gospel is the means which God uses in the saving of His

own chosen ones. By nature God's elect are children of wrath "even as

others"; they are lost sinners needing a Saviour, and apart from Christ

there is no salvation for them. Hence, the Gospel must be believed by

them before they can rejoice in the knowledge of sins forgiven. The

Gospel is God's winnowing fan: it separates the chaff from the wheat,

and gathers the latter into His garner.

Third; it is to be noted that God has other purposes in the preaching

of the Gospel than the salvation of His own elect. The world exists for

the elect's sake yet others have the benefit of it. So the Word is

preached for the elect's sake yet others have the benefit of an

external call. The sun shines though blind men see it not. The rain

falls upon rocky mountains and waste deserts as well as on the fruitful

valleys; so also, God suffers the Gospel to fall on the ears of the

non-elect. The power of the Gospel is one of God's agencies for holding

in check the wickedness of the world. Many who are never saved by it

are reformed, their lusts are bridled, and they are restrained from

becoming worse. Moreover, the preaching of the Gospel to the non-elect

is made an admirable test of their characters. It exhibits the

inveteracy of their sin: it demonstrates that their hearts are at

enmity against God: it justifies the declaration of Christ that "men

loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John

3:19).

Finally; it is sufficient for us to know that we are bidden to preach

the Gospel to every creature. It is not for us to reason about the

consistency between this and the fact that "few are chosen." It is for

us to obey. It is a simple matter to ask questions relating to the ways

of God which no finite mind can fully fathom. We, too, might turn and

remind the objector that our Lord declared "Verily I say unto you, All

sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith

soever they shall blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the

Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness" (Mark 3:28, 29), and there can be

no doubt whatever but that certain of the Jews were guilty of this very

sin (see Matt. 12:24, etc.) and hence their destruction was inevitable.

Yet, notwithstanding, scarcely two months later, He commanded His

disciples to preach the Gospel to every creature. When the objector can

show us the consistency of these two things-the fact that certain of

the Jews had committed the sin for which there is never forgiveness,

and the fact that to them the Gospel was to be preached-we will

undertake to furnish a more satisfactory solution than the one given

above to the harmony between an universal proclamation of the Gospel

and a limitation of its saving power to those only that God has

predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Once more, we say, it is not for us to reason about the Gospel; it is

our business to preach it. When God ordered Abraham to offer up his son

as a burnt-offering he might have objected that this command was

inconsistent with His promise "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." But

instead of arguing he obeyed, and left God to harmonise His promise and

His precept. Jeremiah might have argued that God had bade him to do

that which was altogether unreasonable when He said "Therefore thou

shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to

thee; thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee"

(Jer. 7:27), but instead, the prophet obeyed. Ezekiel, too, might have

complained that the Lord was asking of him a hard thing when He said

"Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with My

words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech

and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people

of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not

understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened

unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they

will not hearken unto Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and

hard hearted" (Ezek. 3:4-7).

"But, O my soul, if truth so bright

Should dazzle and confound thy sight,

Yet still His written Word obey,

And wait the great decisive day."

- Watts.

It has been well said, "The Gospel has lost none of its ancient power.

It is, as much today as when it was first preached, 'the power of God

unto salvation.' It needs no pity, no help, and no handmaid. It can

overcome all obstacles, and break down all barriers. No human device

need be tried to prepare the sinner to receive it, for if God has sent

it no power can hinder it; and if He has not sent it, no power can make

it effectual" (Dr. Bullinger).

This chapter might be extended indefinitely, but it is already too long

so a word or two more must suffice. A number of other questions will be

dealt with in the pages yet to follow, and those that we fail to touch

upon the reader must take to the Lord Himself who has said "If any of

you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally, and

upbraideth not" (James 1:5).

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[13] Romans 5:8 is addressed to saints, and the "we" are the same ones

as those spoken of in 8:29, 30.

[14] Concerning the rich young ruler of whom it is said Christ "loved

him" (Mark 10:21), we fully believe that he was one of God's elect, and

was "saved" sometime after his interview with our Lord. Should it be

said this is an arbitrary assumption and assertion which lacks anything

in the Gospel record to substantiate it, we reply, It is written, "Him

that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out," and this man certainly

did "come" to Him. Compare the case of Nicodemus. He, too, came to

Christ, yet there is nothing in John 3 which intimates he was a saved

man when the interview closed; nevertheless, we know from his later

life that he was not "cast out."

[15] For a further discussion of John 3:16 see Appendix 3.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE VALUE OF THIS DOCTRINE

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for

doctrine, for reproof,

for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God

may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"

(2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for

doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished

unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). "Doctrine" means "teaching,"

and it is by doctrine or teaching that the great realities of God and

of our relation to Him-of Christ, the Spirit, salvation, grace,

glory-are made known to us. It is by doctrine (through the power of the

Spirit) that believers are nourished and edified, and where doctrine is

neglected growth in grace and effective witnessing for Christ

necessarily cease. How sad then that doctrine is now decried as

"unpractical" when, in fact, doctrine is the very base of the practical

life. There is an inseparable connection between belief and practice:

"As he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). The relation

between Divine truth and Christian character is that of cause to

effect: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you

free" (John 8:32)-free from ignorance, free from prejudice, free from

error, free from the wiles of Satan, free from the power of evil; and

if the truth is not "known" then such freedom will not be enjoyed.

Observe the order of mention in the passage with which we have opened.

All Scripture is profitable first for "doctrine"! The same order is

observed throughout the Epistles, particularly in the great doctrinal

treatises of the Apostle Paul. Read the Epistle of "Romans" and it will

be found that there is not a single admonition in the first five

chapters. In the Epistle of "Ephesians" there are no exhortations till

the fourth chapter is reached. The order is first doctrinal exposition

and then admonition or exhortation for the regulation of the daily

walk.

The substitution of so-called "practical" preaching for the doctrinal

exposition which it has supplanted is the root cause of many of the

evil maladies which now afflict the Church of God. The reason why there

is so little depth, so little intelligence, so little grasp of the

fundamental verities of Christianity is because so few believers have

been established in the faith through hearing expounded and through

their own personal study of the doctrines of grace. While their soul is

unestablished in the doctrine of the Divine Inspiration of the

Scripture, their full and verbal inspiration, there can be no firm

foundation for faith to rest upon. While the soul is ignorant of the

doctrine of Justification there can be no real and intelligent

assurance of its acceptance in the Beloved. While the soul is

unacquainted with the teaching of the Word upon Sanctification it is

open to receive all the crudities and errors of the Perfectionists or

"Holiness" people. While the soul knows not what Scripture has to say

upon the doctrine of the New Birth there can be no proper grasp of the

two natures in the believer, and ignorance here inevitably results in

the loss of peace and joy. And so we might go on right through the list

of Christian doctrine. It is ignorance of doctrine that has rendered

the professing church helpless to cope with the rising tide of

infidelity. It is ignorance of doctrine which is mainly responsible for

thousands of professing Christians being captivated by the numerous

false isms of the day. It is because the time has now arrived when the

bulk of our churches "will not endure sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:3) that

they so readily receive false doctrines. Of course it is true that

doctrine, like anything else in Scripture, may be studied from a merely

cold intellectual viewpoint, and thus approached, doctrinal teaching

and doctrinal study will leave the heart untouched, and will naturally

be "dry" and profitless. But, doctrine properly received, doctrine

studied with an exercised heart, will ever lead into a deeper knowledge

of God and of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The doctrine of God's Sovereignty then is no mere metaphysical dogma

which is devoid of practical value, but is one that is calculated to

produce a powerful effect upon Christian character and the daily walk.

The doctrine of God's Sovereignty lies at the foundation of Christian

theology, and in importance is perhaps second only to the Divine

Inspiration of the Scriptures. It is the centre of gravity in the

system of Christian truth: the sun around which all the lesser orbs are

grouped. It is the golden milestone to which every highway of knowledge

leads and from which they all radiate. It is the cord upon which all

other doctrines are strung like so many pearls, holding them in place

and giving them unity. It is the plumbline by which every creed needs

to be measured, the balance in which every human dogma must be weighed.

It is designed as the sheet-anchor for our souls amid the storms of

life. The doctrine of God's Sovereignty is a Divine cordial to refresh

our spirits. It is designed and adapted to old the affections of the

heart and to give a right direction to conduct. It produces gratitude

in prosperity and patience in adversity. It affords comfort for the

present and a sense of security respecting the unknown future. It is,

and it does all, and much more than we have just said because it

ascribes to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the glory which is His

due, and places the creature in his proper place before Him-in the

dust.

We shall now consider the Value of the doctrine in detail.

1. IT DEEPENS OUR VENERATION OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER.

The doctrine of God's Sovereignty as it is unfolded in the Scriptures

affords an exalted view of the Divine perfections. It maintains His

creatorial rights. It insists that "to us there is but one God, the

Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus

Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him" (1 Cor. 8:6). It

declares that His rights are those of the "potter" who forms and

fashions the clay into vessels of whatever type and for whatever use He

may please. Its testimony is "Thou hast created all things, and for Thy

pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). It argues that none

has any right to "reply" against God, and that the only becoming

attitude for the creature to take is one of reverent submission before

Him. Thus the apprehension of the absolute supremacy of God is of great

practical importance, for unless we have a proper regard to His high

Sovereignty He will never be honoured in our thoughts of Him, nor will

He have His proper place in our hearts and lives.

It exhibits the inscrutableness of His wisdom. It shows that while God

is immaculate in His holiness He has permitted evil to enter His fair

creation; that while He is the Possessor of all power He has allowed

the Devil to wage war against Him for six thousand years at least; that

while He is the perfect embodiment of love He spared not His own Son;

that while He is the God of all grace multitudes will be tormented for

ever and ever in the Lake of Fire. High mysteries are these. Scripture

does not deny them, but acknowledges their existence: "O the depth of

the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable

are His judgements, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

It makes known the irreversibleness of His will. "Known unto God are

all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). From the

beginning God purposed to glorify Himself "in the Church by Christ

Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:21). To this end

He created the world and formed man. His all-wise plan was not defeated

when man fell, for in the Lamb "slain from the foundation of the world"

(Rev. 13:8) we behold the Fall anticipated. Nor will God's purpose be

thwarted by the wickedness of men since the Fall, as is clear from the

words of the Psalmist "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the

remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain" (Psa. 76:10). Because God is

the Almighty His will cannot be withstood. "His purposes originated in

eternity, and are carried forward without change to eternity. They

extend to all His works, and control all events. He 'worketh all things

after the counsel of His own will'" (Dr. Rice). Neither man nor Devil

can successfully resist Him, therefore is it written, "The Lord

reigneth; let the people tremble" (Psa. 99:1).

It magnifies His grace. Grace is unmerited favour, and because grace is

shown to the undeserving and Hell-deserving, to those who have no claim

upon God, therefore is grace free and can be manifested toward the

chief of sinners. But because grace is exercised toward those who are

destitute of worthiness or merit grace is Sovereign; that is to say,

God bestows grace upon whom He pleases. Divine Sovereignty has ordained

that some shall be cast into the Lake of Fire to show that all deserved

such a doom. But grace comes in like a dragnet and draws out from a

lost humanity a people for God's name, to be throughout all eternity

the monuments of His inscrutable favour. Sovereign grace reveals God

breaking down the opposition of the human heart, subduing the enmity of

the carnal mind, and bringing us to love Him because He first loved us.

2. IT IS THE SOLID FOUNDATION OF ALL TRUE RELIGION.

This naturally follows from what we have said above under the first

head. If the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty alone gives God His

rightful place, then it is also true that it alone can supply a firm

base for practical religion to build upon. There can be no progress in

Divine things until there is the personal recognition that God is

Supreme, that He is to be feared and revered and He is to be owned and

served as Lord. We read the Scriptures in vain unless we come to them

earnestly desiring a better knowledge of God's will for us: any other

motive is selfish and utterly inadequate and unworthy. Every prayer we

send up to God is but carnal presumption unless it be offered

"according to His will": anything short of this is to ask 'amiss' that

we might consume upon our own lusts the thing requested! Every service

we engage in is but a "dead work" unless it be done for the glory of

God. Experimental religion consists mainly in the perception and

performance of the Divine will, performance both active and passive. We

are predestinated to be "conformed to the image of God's Son" whose

meat it ever was to do the will of the One that sent Him, and the

measure in which each saint is becoming "conformed" practically, in his

daily life, is largely determined by his response to our Lord's word

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in

heart."

3. IT REPUDIATES THE HERESY OF SALVATION BY WORKS.

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are

the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). The way which "seemeth right" and

which ends in "death," death eternal, is salvation by human effort and

merit. The belief in salvation by works is one that is common to human

nature. It may not always assume the grosser form of Popish penances,

or even of Protestant "repentance," i.e., sorrowing for sin, which is

never the meaning of repentance in Scripture; anything which gives man

a place at all is but a variety of the same evil genus. To say, as

alas! many preachers, are saying, God is willing to do His part if you

will do yours, is a wretched and excuseless denial of the Gospel of His

grace. To declare that God helps those who help themselves is to

repudiate one of the most precious truths taught in the Bible, and in

the Bible alone; namely, that God helps those who are unable to help

themselves, who have tried again and again only to fail. To say that

the sinner's salvation turns upon the action of his own will is another

form of the God-dishonouring dogma of salvation by human efforts. In

the final analysis, any movement of the will is a work: it is something

from me, something which I do. But the doctrine of God's Sovereignty

lays the axe at the root of this evil by declaring "It is not of him

that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy"

(Rom. 9:16). Does some one say, Such a doctrine will drive sinners to

despair. The reply is, Be it so; it is just such despair the writer

longs to see prevail. It is not until the sinner despairs of any help

from himself that he will ever fall into the arms of Sovereign mercy;

but if once the Holy Spirit convicts him that there is no help in

himself then he will recognise that he is lost, and will cry, "God be

merciful to me a sinner," and such a cry will be heard. If the author

may be allowed to bear personal witness, he has found during the course

of his ministry that the sermons he has preached on human depravity,

the sinner's helplessness to do anything himself, and the salvation of

the soul turning upon the Sovereign mercy of God, have been those most

owned and blessed in the salvation of the lost. We repeat, then, a

sense of utter helplessness is the first prerequisite to any sound

conversion. There is no salvation for any soul until it looks away from

itself, looks to something, yea, to Someone, outside of itself.

4. IT IS DEEPLY HUMBLING TO THE CREATURE.

This doctrine of the absolute Sovereignty of God is a great

battering-ram against human pride, and in this it is in sharp contrast

from the "doctrines of men." The spirit of our age is essentially that

of boasting and glorying in the flesh. The achievements of man, his

development and progress, his greatness and self-sufficiency, are the

shrine at which the world worships today. But the truth of God's

Sovereignty, with all its corollaries, removes every ground for human

boasting and instils the spirit of humility in its stead. It declares

that salvation is of the Lord-of the Lord in its origination, in its

operation, and in its consummation. It insists that the Lord has to

apply as well as supply, that He has to complete as well as begin His

saving work in our souls, that He has not only to reclaim but to

maintain and sustain us to the end. It teaches that salvation is by

grace through faith, and that all our works (before conversion), good

as well as evil, count for nothing toward salvation. It tells us we are

"born, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of

God" (John 1:13). And all this is most humbling to the heart of man who

wants to contribute something to the price of his redemption and do

that which will afford ground for boasting and self-satisfaction.

But if this doctrine humbles us it results in praise to God. If, in the

light of God's Sovereignty, we have seen our own worthlessness and

helplessness we shall indeed cry with the Psalmist "All my springs are

in Thee" (Psa. 87:7). If by nature we were "children of wrath," and by

practice rebels against the Divine government and justly exposed to the

"curse" of the Law, and if God was under no obligation to rescue us

from the fiery indignation and yet, notwithstanding, He delivered up

His well-beloved Son for us all; then how such grace and love will melt

our hearts, how the apprehension of it will cause us to say in adoring

gratitude "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy name give

glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake" (Psa. 115:1). How

readily shall each of us acknowledge "By the grace of God I am what I

am! With what wondering praise shall we exclaim-

"Why was I made to hear His voice,

And enter while there's room,

When thousands make a wretched choice,

And rather starve than come?

'Twas the same love that spread the feast,

That sweetly forced us in;

Else we had still refused to taste

And perished in our sin."

5. IT AFFORDS A SENSE OF ABSOLUTE SECURITY.

God is infinite in power and therefore it is impossible to withstand

His will or resist the outworking of His decrees. Such a statement as

that is well calculated to fill the sinner with alarm, but from the

saint it evokes naught but praise. Let us add a word and see what a

difference it makes: My God is infinite in power! then "I will not fear

what man can do unto me." My God is infinite in power, then "what time

I am afraid I will trust in Him." My God is infinite in power, then I

will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: "for Thou, LORD, only makest

me dwell in safety" (Psa. 4:8). Right down the ages this has been the

source of the saints' confidence. Was not this the assurance of Moses

when, in his parting words to Israel, he said "There is none like unto

the God of Jeshurun (Israel), who rideth upon the Heaven in Thy help,

and in His excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and

underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:26, 27)? Was it not this

sense of security that caused the Psalmist, moved by the Holy Spirit to

write "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall

abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, He is

my refuge and my fortress, my God: in Him will I trust. Surely He shall

deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome

pestilence. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings

shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler: Thou shalt

not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by

day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the

destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side,

and ten thousand at thy right band, but it shall not come nigh thee.

Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High

thy Habitation; There shall no evil befall thee (instead, all things

will work together for good), neither shall any plague come nigh thy

dwelling" (Psa. 91:1-7, 9-10)?

"Death and plagues around me fly,

Till He bid, I cannot die;

Not a single shaft can hit,

Till the God of love sees fit."

Oh the preciousness of this truth! Here am I, a poor, helpless,

senseless "sheep," yet am I secure in the hand of Christ. And why am I

secure there? None can pluck me thence because the hand that holds me

is that of the Son of God, and all power in Heaven and earth is His!

Again; I have no strength of my own: the world, the flesh, and the

Devil, are arrayed against me so I commit myself into the care and

keeping of the Lord and say with the Apostle "I know Whom I have

believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have

committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). And what is the

ground of my confidence? How do I know that He is able to keep that

which I have committed unto Him? I know it because God is almighty, the

King of kings and Lord of lords.

6. IT SUPPLIES COMFORT IN SORROW.

The doctrine of God's Sovereignty is one that is full of consolation

and imparts great peace to the Christian. The Sovereignty of God is a

foundation that nothing can shake and is more firm than the heavens and

earth. How blessed to know there is no corner of the universe that is

out of His reach! as said the Psalmist, "Whither shall I go from Thy

Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into

Heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art

there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost

parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand

shall hold me. If I say surely the darkness shall cover me; even the

night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee;

but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both

alike to Thee" (Psa. 139:7-12). How blessed it is to know that God's

strong hand is upon every one and every thing! How blessed to know that

not a sparrow falleth to the ground without His notice!

How blessed to know that our very afflictions come not by chance, nor

from the Devil, but are ordained and ordered by God: "That no man

should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are

appointed thereunto" (1 Thess. 3:3)!

But our God is not only infinite in power. He is infinite in wisdom and

goodness too. And herein is the preciousness of this truth. God wills

only that which is good and His will is irreversible and irresistible!

God is too wise to err and too loving to cause His child a needless

tear. Therefore if God be perfect wisdom and perfect goodness how

blessed is the assurance that everything is in His hand and moulded by

His will according to His eternal purpose! "Behold, He taketh away, who

can hinder Him? who will say unto Him what doest Thou?" (Job 9:12).

Yet, how comforting to learn that it is "He," and not the Devil, who

"taketh away" our loved ones! Ah! what peace for our poor frail hearts

to be told that the number of our days is with Him (Job 7:1; 14:5);

that disease and death are His messengers and always march under His

orders; that it is the Lord who gives and the Lord who takes away!

7. IT BEGETS A SPIRIT OF SWEET RESIGNATION.

To bow before the Sovereign will of God is one of the great secrets of

peace and happiness. There can be no real submission with contentment

until we are broken in spirit, that is, until we are willing and glad

for the Lord to have His way with us. Not that we are insisting upon a

spirit of fatalistic acquiescence: far from it. The saints are exhorted

to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God"

(Rom. 12:2).

We touched upon this subject of resignation to God's will in the

chapter upon our Attitude toward God's Sovereignty, and there, in

addition to the supreme Pattern, we cited the examples of Eli and Job:

we would now supplement their cases with further examples. What a word

is that in Leviticus 10:3 "And Aaron held his peace." Look at the

circumstances: "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of

them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and

offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. And

there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died

before the Lord... And Aaron held his peace." Two of the high priests'

sons were slain, slain by a visitation of Divine judgement, and they

were probably intoxicated at the time; moreover, this trial came upon

Aaron suddenly, without anything to prepare him for it; yet he "held

his peace." Precious exemplification of the power of God's

all-sufficient grace!

Consider now an utterance which fell from the lips of David: "And the

king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I

shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and

shew me both it, and His habitation. But if He thus say, I have no

delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good

unto Him" (2 Sam. 15:25, 26). Here, to, the circumstances which

confronted the speaker were exceedingly trying to the human heart.

David was sore pressed with sorrow. His own son was driving him from

the throne and seeking his very life. Whether he would ever see

Jerusalem and the Tabernacle again he knew not. But he was so yielded

up to God, he was so fully assured that His will was best, that even

though it meant the loss of the throne and the loss of his life he was

content for Him to have His way-"let Him do to me as seemeth Him good."

There is no need to multiply examples, but a reflection upon the last

case will be in place. If amid the shadows of the Old Testament

dispensation David was content for the Lord to have His way, now that

the heart of God has been fully revealed at the Cross how much more

ought we to delight in the execution of His will! Surely we shall have

no hesitation in saying-

"Ill that He blesses is our good,

And unblest good is ill,

And all is right that seems most wrong,

If it be His sweet will."

8. IT EVOKES A SONG OF PRAISE.

It could not be otherwise. Why should I, who am by nature no different

from the careless and godless throngs all around, have been chosen in

Christ before the foundation of the world and now blest with all

spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Him! Why was I, that once was

an alien and a rebel, singled out for such wondrous favours! Ah! that

is something I cannot fathom. Such grace, such love, "passeth

knowledge." But if my mind is unable to discern a reason my heart can

express its gratitude in praise and adoration. But not only should I be

grateful to God for His grace toward me in the past, His present

dealings will fill me with thanksgiving. What is the force of that word

"Rejoice in the Lord alway" (Phil. 4:4)? Mark it is not "Rejoice in the

Saviour," but we are to "Rejoice in the Lord" as "Lord," as the Master

of every circumstance. Need we remind the reader that when the Apostle

penned these words he was himself a prisoner in the hands of the Roman

government. A long course of affliction and suffering lay behind him.

Perils on land and perils on sea, hunger and thirst, scourging and

stoning, had all been experienced. He had been persecuted by those

within the church as well as by those without: the very ones who ought

to have stood by him had forsaken him. And still he writes, "Rejoice in

the Lord alway"! What was the secret of his peace and happiness? Ah!

had not this same Apostle written "And we know that all things work

together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called

according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28)? But how did he, and how do we,

"know" that all things work together for good? The answer is, Because

all things are under the control of and are being regulated by the

Supreme Sovereign, and because He has naught but thoughts of love

toward His own, then "all things" are so ordered by Him that they are

made to minister to our ultimate good. It is for this cause we are to

give "thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name

of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20). Yes, give thanks for "all

things" for, as it has been well said "Our disappointments are but His

appointments." To the one who delights in the Sovereignty of God the

clouds not only have a 'silver lining' but they are silver all through,

the darkness only serving to offset the light-

"Ye fearful saints fresh courage take

The clouds ye so much dread,

Are big with mercy and shall break

In blessings o'er your head."

9. IT GUARANTEES THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF GOOD OVER EVIL.

Ever since the day that Cain slew Abel, the conflict on earth between

good and evil has been a sore problem to the saints. In every age the

righteous have appeared to defy God with impunity. The Lord's people,

for the most part, have been poor in this world's good whereas the

wicked in their temporal prosperity have flourished like the green bay

tree. As one looks around and beholds the oppression of believers and

the earthly success of unbelievers, and notes how few are the former

and how numerous the latter; as he sees the apparent defeat of the

right and the triumphing of might and the wrong; as he hears the roar

of battle, the cries of the wounded, and the lamentations of the

bereaved; as he discovers that almost everything down here is in

confusion, chaos, and ruins, it seems as though Satan were getting the

better of the conflict. But as one looks above, instead of around,

there is plainly visible to the eye of faith a Throne, a Throne

unaffected by the storms of earth, a Throne that is "set," stable and

secure; and upon it is seated One whose name is the Almighty, and who

"worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

This then is our confidence-God is on the Throne. The helm is in His

hand, and being Almighty His purpose cannot fail for "He is in one

mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He

doeth" (Job. 23:13). Though God's governing hand is invisible to the

eye of sense it is real to faith, that faith which rests with sure

confidence upon His Word, and therefore is assured He cannot fail. What

follows below is from the pen of our brother, Mr. A. C. Gaebelein.

"There can be no failure with God. 'God is not a man, that He should

lie; neither the Son of man, that He should repent: hath He said and

shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"

(Num. 23:19). All will be accomplished. The promise made to His own

beloved people to come for them and take them from hence to glory will

not fail. He will surely come and gather them in His own presence. The

solemn words spoken to the nations of the earth by the different

prophets will also not fail. 'Come near, ye nations, to hear; and

hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the

world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the

LORD is upon all nations, and His fury upon all their armies: He hath

utterly destroyed them, He hath delivered them to the slaughter' (Isa.

34:1, 2). Nor will that day fail in which 'the lofty looks of man shall

be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the

LORD alone shall be exalted' (Isa. 2:11). The day in which He is

manifested, when His glory shall cover the heavens and His feet will

stand again upon this earth, will surely come. His kingdom will not

fail, nor all the promised events connected with the end of the age and

the consummation.

"In these dark and trying times how well it is to remember that He is

on the throne, the throne which cannot be shaken, and that He will not

fail in doing all He has spoken and promised. 'Seek ye out of the book

of the LORD, and read: No one of these shall fail' (Isa. 34:16). In

believing, blessed anticipation, we can look on to the glory-time when

His Word and His Will is accomplished, when through the coming of the

Prince of Peace, righteousness and peace comes at last. And while we

wait for the supreme and blessed moment when His promise to us is

accomplished, we trust Him, walking in His fellowship and daily find

afresh, that He does not fail to sustain and keep us in all our ways."

10. IT PROVIDES A RESTING-PLACE FOR THE HEART.

Much that might have been said here has already been anticipated under

previous heads. The One seated upon the Throne of Heaven, the One who

is Governor over the nations and who has ordained and now regulates all

events, is infinite not only in power but in wisdom and goodness as

well. He who is Lord over all creation is the One that was "manifest in

the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). Ah! here is a theme no human pen can do

justice to. The glory of God consists not merely in that He is Highest,

but in that being high He stooped in lowly love to bear the burden of

His own sinful creatures, for it is written "God was in Christ,

reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). The Church of God

was purchased "with His own Blood" (Acts 20:28). It is upon the

gracious self-humiliation of the King Himself that His kingdom is

established. O wondrous Cross! By it He who suffered upon it has become

not the Lord of our destinies (He was that before), but the Lord of our

hearts. Therefore, it is not in abject terror that we bow before the

Supreme Sovereign, but in adoring worship we cry "Worthy is the Lamb

that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength,

and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12).

Here then is the refutation of the wicked charge that this doctrine is

a horrible calumny upon God and dangerous to expound to His people. Can

a doctrine be "horrible" and "dangerous" that gives God His true place,

that maintains His rights, that magnifies His grace, that ascribes all

glory to Him and removes every ground of boasting from the creature?

Can a doctrine be "horrible" and "dangerous" which affords the saints a

sense of security in danger, that supplies them comfort in sorrow, that

begets patience within them in adversity, that evokes from them praise

at all times? Can a doctrine be "horrible" and "dangerous" which

assures us of the certain triumph of good over evil, and which provides

a sure resting-place for our hearts, and that place, the perfections of

the Sovereign Himself? No; a thousand times, no! Instead of being

"horrible and dangerous" this doctrine of the Sovereignty of God is

glorious and edifying, and a due apprehension of it will but serve to

make us exclaim with Moses, "Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the

gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing

wonders?" (Exo. 15:11).

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CONCLUSION

"Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth"

(Rev. 19:6).

In our Foreword to the Second Edition we acknowledge the need for

preserving the balance of Truth. Two things are beyond dispute: God is

Sovereign, man is responsible. In this book we have sought to expound

the former; in our other works we have frequently pressed the latter.

That there is real danger of over-emphasising the one and ignoring the

other, we readily admit; yea, history furnishes numerous examples of

cases of each. To emphasise the Sovereignty of God without also

maintaining the accountability of the creature tends to fatalism; to be

so concerned in maintaining the responsibility of man as to lose sight

of the Sovereignty of God is to exalt the creature and dishonour the

Creator.

Almost all doctrinal error is really, Truth perverted, Truth wrongfully

divided, Truth disproportionately held and taught. The fairest face on

earth, with the most comely features, would soon become ugly and

unsightly if one member continued growing while the others remained

undeveloped. Beauty is, primarily, a matter of proportion. Thus it is

with the Word of God: its beauty and blessedness are best perceived

when its manifold wisdom is exhibited in its true proportions. Here is

where so many have failed in the past. A single phase of God's Truth

has so impressed this man or that he has concentrated his attention

upon it, almost to the exclusion of everything else. Some portion of

God's Word has been made a "pet doctrine," and often this has become

the distinctive badge of some party. But it is the duty of each servant

of God to "declare all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

It is true that the degenerate days in which our lot is cast, when on

every side man is exalted and "superman" has become a common

expression, there is real need for a special emphasis upon the glorious

fact of God's supremacy. The more so where this is expressly denied.

Yet even here much wisdom is required lest our zeal should not be

"according to knowledge." The words "meat in due season" should ever be

before the servant of God. What is needed, primarily, by one

congregation may not be specifically needed by another. If called to

labour where Arminian preachers have preceded, then the neglected truth

of God's Sovereignty should be expounded, though with caution and care

lest too much "strong meat" be given to "babes." The example of Christ

in John 16:12 "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot

bear them now," must be borne in mind. On the other hand, if I am

called to take charge of a distinctly Calvinistic pulpit, then the

truth of human responsibility (in its many aspects) may be profitably

set forth. What the preacher needs to give out is not what his people

most like to hear, but what they most need, i.e., those aspects of

truth they are least familiar with, or least exhibiting in their walk.

To carry into actual practice what we have inculcated above will, most

probably, lay the preacher open to the charge of being a Turncoat. But

what matters that if he has his Master's approval? He is not called

upon to be "consistent" with himself nor with any rules drawn up by

man; his business is to be consistent with Holy Writ. And in Scripture

each part or aspect of Truth is balanced by another aspect of Truth.

There are two sides to everything, even to the character of God for He

is "light" (1 John 1:5) as well as "love" (1 John 4:8), and therefore

are we called upon to "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of

God" (Rom. 11:22). To be all the time preaching on the one to the

exclusion of the other caricatures the Divine character.

When the Son of God became incarnate He came here in "the form of a

servant" (Phil. 2:7); nevertheless, in the manger He was "Christ the

Lord" (Luke 2:11)! All things are possible with God (Matt. 19:26) yet

God "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2). Scripture says "Bear ye one another's

burdens" (Gal. 6:2), yet the same chapter insists "every man shall bear

his own burden" (Gal. 6:5). We are enjoined to take "no thought for the

morrow" (Matt. 6:34), yet "if any provide not for his own, and

specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is

worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). No sheep of Christ's can perish

(John 10:28, 29), yet the Christian is bidden to make his "calling and

election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). And so we might go on multiplying

illustrations. These things are not contradictions but complementaries:

the one "balances the other." Thus, the Scriptures set forth both the

Sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. So, too, should every

servant of God, and that, in their proper proportion.

But we return now to a few closing reflections upon our present theme,

"And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in

the house of the LORD, before the new court, and said, ) LORD God of

our fathers, art not Thou God in Heaven? and rulest not Thou over all

the kingdoms of the heathen? and in Thine hand is there not power and

might, so that none is able to withstand Thee?" (2 Chron. 20:5, 6).

Yes, the Lord is God, ruling in supreme majesty and might. Yet in our

day, a day of boasted enlightenment and progress, this is denied on

every hand. A materialistic science and atheistic philosophy have bowed

God out of His own world, and everything is regulated, forsooth, by

(impersonal) laws of Nature. So in human affairs: at best God is a

far-distant spectator, and a helpless one at that. God could not help

the launching of the dreadful war, and though He longed to put a stop

to it He was unable to do so-and this in the face of 1 Chronicles 5:22;

2 Chronicles 24:24! Having endowed man with "free agency" God is

obliged to let man make his own choice and go his own way, and He

cannot interfere with him, or otherwise his moral responsibility would

be destroyed! Such are the popular beliefs of the day. One is not

surprised to find these sentiments emanating from German theologians,

but how sad that they should be taught in many of our Seminaries,

echoed from many of our pulpits, and accepted by many of the rank and

file of professing Christians.

One of the most flagrant sins of our age is that of irreverence-the

failure to ascribe the glory which is due the august majesty of God.

Men limit the power and activities of the Lord in their degrading

concepts of His being and character. Originally, man was made in the

image and likeness of God, but today we are asked to believe in a god

made in the image and likeness of man. The Creator is reduced to the

level of the creature: His omniscience is called into question, His

omnipotency is no longer believed in, and His absolute Sovereignty is

flatly denied. Men claim to be the architects of their own fortunes and

the determiners of their own destiny. They know not that their lives

are at the disposal of the Divine Despot. They know not they have no

more power to thwart His secret decrees than a worm has to resist the

tread of an elephant. They know not that "The LORD hath prepared His

throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all" (Psa. 103:19).

In the foregoing pages we have sought to repudiate such paganistic

views as the above-mentioned, and have endeavoured to show from

Scripture that God is God, on the Throne, and that so far from the

recent war being an evidence that the helm had slipped out of His hand

it was a sure proof that He still lives and reigns, and is now bringing

to pass that which He had fore-determined and fore-announced (Matt.

24:6-8 etc.). That the carnal mind is enmity against God, that the

unregenerate man is a rebel against the Divine government, that the

sinner has no concern for the glory of his Maker, and little or no

respect for His revealed will, is freely granted. But, nevertheless,

behind the scenes God is ruling and over-ruling, fulfilling His eternal

purpose, not only in spite of but also by means of those who are His

enemies.

How earnestly are the claims of man contended for against the claims of

God! Has not man power and knowledge, but what of it? Has God no will,

or power, or knowledge? Suppose man's will conflicts with God's, then

what? Turn to the Scripture of Truth for answer. Men had a will on the

plains of Shinar and determined to build a tower whose top should reach

unto Heaven, but what came of their purpose? Pharaoh had a will when He

hardened his heart and Pharaoh refused to allow Jehovah's people to go

and worship Him in the wilderness, but what came of his rebellion?

Balak had a will when he hired Balaam to come and curse the Hebrews,

but of what avail was it? The Canaanites had a will when they

determined to prevent Israel occupying the land of Canaan, but how far

did they succeed? Saul had a will when he hurled his javelin at David,

but it entered the wall instead! Jonah had a will when he refused to go

and preach to the Ninevites, but what came of it? Nebuchadnezzar had a

will when he thought to destroy the three Hebrew children, but God had

a will too, and the fire did not harm them. Herod had a will when he

sought to slay the Child Jesus, and had there been no living, reigning

God, his evil desire would have been effected: but in daring to pit his

puny will against the irresistible will of the Almighty his efforts

came to nought. Yes, my reader, and you, too, had a will when you

formed your plans without first seeking counsel of the Lord, therefore

did He overturn them! "There are many devices in a man's heart;

nevertheless the counsel of LORD, that shall stand" (Prov. 19:21).

What a demonstration of the irresistible Sovereignty of God is

furnished by that wonderful statement found in Revelation 17:17: "For

God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree, and give

their kingdom unto the Beast, until the words of God shall be

fulfilled." The fulfilment of any single prophecy is but the

Sovereignty of God in operation. It is the demonstration that what He

has decreed He is able also to perform. It is proof that none can

withstand the execution of His counsel or prevent the accomplishment of

His pleasure. It is evidence that God inclines men to fulfil that which

He has ordained and perform that which He has fore-determined. If God

were not absolute Sovereign then Divine prophecy would be valueless,

for in such case no guarantee would be left that what He had predicted

would surely come to pass.

"For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree, and

give their kingdom unto the Beast, until the words of God shall be

fulfilled" (Rev. 17:17). We can not do better than quote here the

excellent comments of our esteemed friend, Mr. Walter Scott, upon this

verse-"God works unseen, but not the less truly, in all the political

changes of the day. The astute statesman, the clever diplomatist, is

simply an agent in the Lord's hands. He knows it not. Self-will and

motives of policy may influence to action, but God is steadily working

toward an end-to exhibit the heavenly and earthly glories of His Son.

Thus, instead of kings and statesmen thwarting God's purpose, they

unconsciously forward it. God is not indifferent, but is behind the

scenes of human action. The doings of the future ten kings in relation

to Babylon and the Beast-the ecclesiastical and secular powers-are not

only under the direct control of God, but all is done in fulfilment of

His words."

Closely connected with Revelation 17:17 is that which is brought before

us in Micah 4:11, 12: "Now also many nations are gathered against thee,

that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they

know not the thoughts of the LORD, neither understand they His counsel:

for He shall gather them as sheaves into the floor." This is another

remarkable statement, inspired of God, and three things in it deserve

special notice. First, a day is coming when "many nations" shall

"gather against" Israel with the express purpose of humiliating her.

Second, quite unconsciously to themselves-for they "understand not" His

counsel-they are "gathered" together by God, for "He shall gather

them." Third, God gathers these "many nations" against Israel in order

that the daughter of Zion may "beat them in pieces" (v. 13). Here then

is another instance which demonstrates God's absolute control of the

nations, of His power to fulfil His secret counsel or decrees through

and by them, and of His inclining men to perform His pleasure though it

be performed blindly and unwittingly by them.

Once more. What a word was that of the Lord Jesus as He stood before

Pilate! Who can depict the scene! There was the Roman official, and

there also was the Servant of Jehovah standing before him. Said Pilate,

"Whence art Thou?" And we read "Jesus gave him no answer." Then said

Pilate unto Him "Speakest Thou not unto me? Knowest Thou not that I

have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee?" (John

19:10). Ah! that is what Pilate thought. That is what many another has

thought. He was merely voicing the common conviction of the human

heart, the heart which leaves God out of its reckoning. But hear the

Lord Jesus as He corrects Pilate, and at the same time repudiates the

proud boasting of men in general: "thou couldest have no power against

Me, except it were given thee from above" (John 19:11). How sweeping is

this assertion! Man-even though he be a prominent official in the most

influential empire of his day-has no power except that which is given

him from above, no power, even, to do that which is evil, i.e., carry

out his own evil designs unless God empowers him so that His purpose

may be forwarded. It was God who gave Pilate the power to sentence to

death His well-beloved Son! And how this rebukes the sophistries and

reasonings of men who argue that God does nothing more than permit

evil! Why, go right back to the very first words spoken by the Lord God

to man after the Fall and hear Him saying "I will put ENMITY between

thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed" (Gen. 3:15)!

Bare permission of sin does not cover all the facts which are revealed

in Scripture touching this mystery. As Calvin succinctly remarked "But

what reason shall we assign for His permitting it but because it is His

will?"

At the close of Chapter Eleven we promised to give attention to one or

two other difficulties which were not examined at that time. To them we

now turn. If God has not only predetermined the salvation of His own

but has also foreordained the good works which they are to walk in

(Eph. 2:10), then what incentive remains for us to strive after

practical godliness? If God has fixed the number of those who are to be

saved, and the others are vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, then

what encouragement have we to preach the Gospel to the lost? Let us

take up these questions in the order of mention.

1. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND THE BELIEVER'S GROWTH IN GRACE.

If God has foreordained everything that comes to pass, of what avail is

it for us to "exercise" ourselves "unto godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7)? If God

has before ordained the good works in which we are to walk (Eph. 2:10)

then why should we be "careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8)?

This only raises once more the problem of human responsibility. Really,

it should be enough for us to reply, God has bidden us do so. Nowhere

does Scripture inculcate or encourage a spirit of fatalistic

indifference. Contentment with our present attainments is expressly

disallowed. The word to every believer is "Press toward the mark for

the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).

This was the Apostle's aim, and it should be ours. Instead of hindering

the development of Christian character, a proper apprehension and

appreciation of God's Sovereignty will forward it. Just as the sinner's

despair of any help from himself is the first prerequisite of a sound

conversion, so the loss of all confidence in himself is the first

essential in the believer's growth in grace; and just as the sinner

despairing of help from himself will cast him into the arms of

Sovereign mercy so the Christian, conscious of his own frailty, will

turn unto the Lord for power. It is when we are weak we are strong (2

Cor. 12:10): that is to say, there must be consciousness of our

weakness before we shall turn to the Lord for help. While the Christian

allows the thought that he is sufficient in himself, while he imagines

that by mere force of will he shall resist temptation, while he has any

confidence in the flesh then, like Peter who boasted that though all

forsook the Lord yet should not he, so we shall certainly fail and

fall. Apart from Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). The promise of

God is "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might

(of their own) He increaseth strength" (Isa. 40:29).

The question now before us is of great practical importance, and we are

deeply anxious to express ourselves clearly and simply. The secret of

development of Christian character is the realisation of our own

powerlessness, acknowledged powerlessness, and the consequent turning

unto the Lord for help. The plain fact is that of ourselves we cannot

do this, or make ourselves do it. "In nothing be anxious"-but who can

avoid and prevent anxiety when things go wrong? "Awake to righteousness

and sin not"-but who can help sinning? These are merely examples

selected at random from scores of others. Does then God mock us by

biding us do what He knows we are unable to do? The answer of Augustine

to this question is the best we have met with-"God gives commands we

cannot perform, that we may know what we ought to request from Him." A

consciousness of our powerlessness should cast us upon Him who has all

power. Here then is where a vision and view of God's Sovereignty helps,

for it reveals His sufficiency and shows us our insufficiency.

2. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND CHRISTIAN SERVICE.

If God has determined before the foundation of the world the precise

number of those who shall be saved then why should we concern ourselves

about the eternal destiny of those with whom we come into contact? What

place is left for zeal in Christian service? Will not the doctrine of

God's Sovereignty, and its corollary of predestination, discourage the

Lord's servants from faithfulness in evangelism? No; instead of

discouraging His servants a recognition of God's Sovereignty is most

encouraging to them. Here is one, for example, who is called upon to do

the work of an evangelist, and he goes forth believing in the freedom

of the will and in the sinner's own ability to come to Christ. He

preaches the Gospel as faithfully and zealously as he knows how; but he

finds the vast majority of his hearers are utterly indifferent and have

no heart at all for Christ. He discovers that men are, for the most

part, thoroughly wrapped up in the things of the world, and that few

have any concern about the world to come. He beseeches men to be

reconciled to God and pleads with them over their soul's salvation. But

it is of no avail. He becomes thoroughly disheartened and asks himself,

What is the use of it all? Shall he quit, or had he better change his

mission and message? If men will not respond to the Gospel, had he not

better engage in that which is more popular and acceptable to the

world? Why not occupy himself with humanitarian efforts, with social

uplift work, with the purity campaign? Alas! that so many men who once

preached the Gospel are now engaged in these activities instead.

What then is God's corrective for His discouraged servant? First, he

needs to learn from Scripture that God is not now seeking to convert

the world, but that in this Age He is "taking out of the Gentiles" a

people for His name (Acts 15:14). What then is God's corrective for His

discouraged servant? This: a proper apprehension of God's plan for this

Dispensation. Again: what is God's remedy for dejection at apparent

failure in our labours? This: the assurance that God's purpose cannot

fail, that God's plans cannot miscarry, that God's will must be done.

Our labours are not intended to bring about that which God has not

decreed. Once more: what is God's word of cheer for the one who is

thoroughly disheartened at the lack of response to his appeals and the

absence of fruit, for his labours? This: that we are not responsible

for results: that is God's side, and God's business. Paul may "plant,"

and Apollos may "water," but it is God who "gave the increase" (1 Cor.

3:6). Our business is to obey Christ and preach the Gospel to every

creature, to emphasise the "Whosoever believeth" and then to leave the

Sovereign operations of the Holy Spirit to apply the Word in quickening

power to whom He wills, resting on the sure promise of Jehovah: "For as

the rain cometh down, and the snow from Heaven, and returneth not

thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud,

that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall My

Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me

void, but it shall accomplish that which I please (it may not be that

which we please), and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it"

(Isa. 55:10, 11). Was it not this assurance that sustained the beloved

Apostle when he declared "Therefore (see context) I endure all things

for the elect's sake" (2 Tim. 2:10)! Yea, is not this same lesson to be

learned from the blessed example of the Lord Jesus! When we read that

He said to the people "Ye also have seen Me, and believe not," He fell

back upon the Sovereign pleasure of the One who sent Him, saying "All

that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me I

will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). He knew that His labour would

not be in vain. He knew God's Word would not return unto Him "void." He

knew that "God's elect" would come to Him and believe on Him. And this

same assurance fills the soul of every servant who intelligently rests

upon the blessed truth of God's Sovereignty.

Ah, fellow-Christian-worker, God has not sent us forth to "draw a bow

at a venture." The success of the ministry which He has committed into

our hands is not left contingent on the fickleness of the wills in

those to whom we preach. How gloriously encouraging, how

soul-sustaining the assurance are those words of our Lord's if we rest

on them in simple faith: "And other sheep I have ("have" mark you, not

"will have"; "have" because given to Him by the Father before the

foundation of the world), which are not of this fold (i.e. the Jewish

fold then existing): them also I must bring, and they shall hear My

voice" (John 10:16). Not simply, "they ought to hear My voice," not

simply "they may hear My voice," not "they will if they are willing."

There is no "if," no uncertainty about it. "They shall hear My voice"

is His own positive, unqualified, absolute promise. Here then is where

faith is to rest! Continue your quest, dear friend, after the "other

sheep" of Christ's. Be not discouraged because the "goats" heed not His

voice as you preach the Gospel. Be faithful, be scriptural, be

persevering, and Christ may use even you to be His mouthpiece in

calling some of His lost sheep unto Himself. "Therefore, my beloved

brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of

the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the

Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

It now remains for us to offer a few closing reflections and our happy

task is finished.

God's Sovereign election of certain ones to salvation is a MERCIFUL

provision. The sufficient answer to all the wicked accusations that the

doctrine of Predestination is cruel, horrible, and unjust, is that

unless God had chosen certain ones to salvation none would have been

saved, for "there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11). This is

no mere inference of ours but the definite teaching of Holy Scripture.

Attend closely to the words of the Apostle in Romans 9 where this theme

is fully discussed: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as

the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved... And as Esaias (Isaiah)

said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been

as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrah" (Rom. 9:27, 29). The

teaching of this passage is unmistakable: but for Divine interference

Israel would have become as Sodom and Gomorrah. Had God left Israel

alone human depravity would have run its course to its own tragic end.

But God left Israel a "remnant" or "seed." Of old the cities of the

plain had been obliterated for their sin and none was left to survive

them; and so it would have been in Israel's case had not God "left" or

spared a remnant. Thus it is with the human race: but for God's

Sovereign grace in sparing a remnant all of Adam's descendants had

perished in their sins. Therefore, we say that God's Sovereign election

of certain ones to salvation is a merciful provision. And, be it noted,

in choosing the ones He did God did no injustice to the others who were

passed by, for none had any right to salvation. Salvation is by grace,

and the exercise of grace is a matter of pure Sovereignty-God might

save all or none, many or few, one or ten thousand, just as He saw

best. Should it be replied, But surely it were "best" to save all, the

answer would be: We are not capable of judging. We might have thought

it "best" never to have created Satan, never to have allowed sin to

enter the world, or having entered to have brought the conflict between

good and evil to an end long before now. Ah! God's ways are not ours,

and His ways are "past finding out."

God foreordains everything which comes to pass. His Sovereign rule

extends throughout the entire Universe and is over every creature. "For

of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things" (Rom. 11:36). God

initiates all things, regulates all things, and all things are working

unto His eternal glory. "There is but one God, the Father, of whom are

all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all

things, and we by Him" (1 Cor. 8:6). And again, "According to the

purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own

will" (Eph. 1:11). Surely if anything could be ascribed to chance it is

the drawing of lots, and yet the Word of God expressly declares "The

lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the

LORD" (Prov. 16:33)!

God's wisdom in the government of our world shall yet be completely

vindicated before all created intelligences. God is no idle Spectator,

looking on from a distant world at the happenings, on our earth, but is

Himself shaping everything to the ultimate promotion of His own glory.

Even now He is working out His eternal purpose, not only in spite of

human and Satanic opposition but by means of them. How wicked and

futile have been all efforts to resist His will shall one day be as

fully evident as when of old He overthrew the rebellious Pharaoh and

his hosts at the Red Sea.

It has been well said "The end and object of all is the glory of God.

It is perfectly, divinely true, that 'God hath ordained for His own

glory whatsoever comes to pass.' In order to guard this from all

possibility of mistake, we have only to remember who is this God, and

what the glory that He seeks. It is He who is the God and Father of our

Lord Jesus Christ-of Him in whom divine love came seeking not her own,

among us as 'One that serveth.' It is He who, sufficient in Himself,

can receive no real accession of glory from His creatures, but from

whom-'Love,' as He is 'Light'-cometh down every good and every perfect

gift, in whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning. Of His own

alone can His creatures give to Him."

"The glory of such an one is found in the display of His own goodness,

righteousness, holiness, truth; in manifesting Himself as in Christ He

has manifested Himself and will forever. The glory of this God is what

of necessity all things must serve-adversaries and evil as well as all

else. He has ordained it; His power will insure it; and when all

apparent clouds and obstructions are removed, then shall He rest-'rest

in His love' forever, although eternity only will suffice for the

apprehension of the revelation. 'God shall be all in all' (italics ours

throughout this paragraph) gives in six words the ineffable result" (F.

W. Grant on "Atonement").

That what we have written gives but an incomplete and imperfect

presentation of this most important subject we must sorrowfully

confess. Nevertheless, if it results in a clearer apprehension of the

majesty of God and His Sovereign mercy we shall be amply repaid for our

labours. If the reader has received blessing from the perusal of these

pages let him not fail to return thanks to the Giver of every good and

every perfect gift, ascribing all praise to His inimitable and

Sovereign grace.

"The Lord, our God, is clothed with might,

The winds and waves obey His will;

He speaks, and in the shining height

The sun and rolling worlds stand still.

Rebel ye waves, and o'er the land

With threatening aspect foam and roar,

The Lord hath spoken His command

That breaks your rage upon the shore.

Ye winds of night, your force combine-

Without His holy high behest

You shall not in a mountain pine

Disturb the little swallow's nest.

His voice sublime is heard afar;

In distant peals it fades and dies;

He binds the cyclone to His car

And sweeps the howling murky skies.

Great God! how infinite art Thou,

What weak and worthless worms are we,

Let all the race of creatures bow

And seek salvation now from Thee.

Eternity, with all its years

Stands ever-present to Thy view,

To Thee there's nothing old appears

Great God! There can be nothing new.

Our lives through varied scenes are drawn,

And vexed with mean and trifling cares;

While Thine eternal thought moves on

Thy fixed and undisturbed affairs."

"Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. 19:6).

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APPENDIX 1

THE WILL OF GOD

In treating of the Will of God some theologians have differentiated

between His decretive will and His permissive will, insisting that

there are certain things which God has positively fore-ordained, but

other things which He merely suffers to exist or happen. But such a

distinction is really no distinction at all, inasmuch as God only

permits that which is according to His will. No such distinction would

have been invented had these theologians discerned that God could have

decreed the existence and activities of sin without Himself being the

Author of sin. Personally, we much prefer to adopt the distinction made

by the older Calvinists between God's secret and revealed will, or, to

state it in another way, His disposing and His preceptive will.

God's revealed will is made known in His Word, but His secret will is

His own hidden counsels. God's revealed will is the definer of our duty

and the standard of our responsibility. The primary and basic reason

why I should follow a certain course or do a certain thing is because

it is God's will that I should, His will being clearly defined for me

in His Word. That I should not follow a certain course, that I must

refrain from doing certain things, is because they are contrary to

God's revealed will. But suppose I disobey God's Word, then do I not

cross His will? And if so, how can it still be true that God's will is

always done and His counsel accomplished at all times? Such questions

should make evident the necessity for the distinction here advocated.

God's revealed will is frequently crossed, but His secret will is never

thwarted. That it is legitimate for us to make such a distinction

concerning God's will is clear from Scripture. Take these two passages:

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3);

"For who hath resisted His will?" (Rom. 9:19). Would any thoughtful

reader declare that God's "will" has precisely the same meaning in both

of these passages? We surely hope not. The first passage refers to

God's revealed will, the latter to His secret will. The first passage

concerns our duty, the latter declares that God's secret purpose is

immutable and must come to pass notwithstanding the creature's

insubordination. God's revealed will is never done perfectly or fully

by any of us, but His secret will never fails of accomplishment even in

the minutest particular. His secret will mainly concerns future events;

His revealed will, our present duty: the one has to do with His

irresistible purpose, the other with His manifested pleasure: the one

is wrought upon us and accomplished through us, the other is to be done

by us.

The secret will of God is His eternal, unchanging purpose concerning

all things which He bath made, to be brought about by certain means to

their appointed ends: of this God expressly declares "My counsel shall

stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). This is the

absolute, efficacious will of God, always effected, always fulfilled.

The revealed will of God contains not His purpose and decree but our

duty,--not what He will do according to His eternal counsel, but what

we should do if we would please Him, and this is expressed in the

precepts and promises of His Word. Whatever God has determined within

Himself, whether to do Himself, or to do by others, or to suffer to be

done, whilst it is in His own breast, and is not made known by any

event in providence, or by precept, or by prophecy, is His secret will.

Such are the deep things of God, the thoughts of His heart, the

counsels of His mind, which are impenetrable to all creatures. But when

these are made known they become His revealed will: such is almost the

whole of the book of Revelation, wherein God has made known to us

"things which must shortly come to pass (Rev. 1:1--"must" because He

has eternally purposed that they should).

It has been objected by Arminian theologians that the division of God's

will into secret and revealed is untenable, because it makes God to

have two different wills, the one opposed to the other. But this is a

mistake, due to their failure to see that the secret and revealed will

of God respect entirely different objects. If God should require and

forbid the same thing, or if He should decree the same thing should and

should not exist, then would His secret and revealed will be

contradictory and purposeless. If those who object to the secret and

revealed will of God being inconsistent would only make the same

distinction in this case that they do in many other cases, the seeming

inconsistency would at once disappear. How often do men draw a sharp

distinction between what is desirable in its own nature. and what is

not desirable all things considered. For example, the fond parent does

not desire simply considered to punish his offending child, but, all

things considered, he knows it is his bounden duty, and so corrects his

child. And though he tells his child he does not desire to punish him,

but that he is satisfied it is for the best all things considered to do

so, then an intelligent child would see no inconsistency in what his

father says and does. Just so the All-wise Creator may consistently

decree to bring to pass things which He hates, forbids and condemns.

God chooses that some things shall exist which He thoroughly hates (in

their intrinsic nature), and He also chooses that some things shall not

yet exist which He perfectly loves (in their intrinsic nature). For

example: He commanded that Pharaoh should let His people go, because

that was right in the nature of things, yet, He had secretly declared

that Pharaoh should not let His people go, not because it was right in

Pharaoh to refuse, but because it was best all things considered that

he should not let them go--i.e. best because it subserved God's larger

purpose.

Again; God commands us to be perfectly holy in this life (Matt. 5:48),

because this is right in the nature of things, but He has decreed that

no man shall be perfectly holy in this life, because this is best all

things considered that none shall be perfectly holy (experimentally)

before they leave this world. Holiness is one thing, the taking place

of holiness is another; so, sin is one thing, the taking place of sin

is another. When God requires holiness His preceptive or revealed will

respects the nature or moral excellence of holiness; but when He

decrees that holiness shall not take place (fully and perfectly) His

secret or decretive will respects only the event of it not taking

place. So, again, when He forbids sin, His preceptive or revealed will

respects only the nature or moral evil of sin; but when He decrees that

sin shall take place, His secret will respects only its actual

occurrence to serve His good purpose. Thus the secret and revealed will

of God respect entirely different objects.

God's will of decree is not His will in the same sense as His will of

command is. Therefore, there is no difficulty in supposing that one may

be contrary to the other. His will, in both senses, is His inclination.

Everything that concerns His revealed will is perfectly agreeable to

His nature, as when He commands love, obedience, and service from His

creatures. But that which concerns His secret will has in view His

ultimate end, that to which all things are now working. Thus, He

decreed the entrance of sin into His universe, though His own holy

nature hates all sin with infinite abhorrence, yet, because it is one

of the means by which His appointed end is to be reached He suffered it

to enter. God's revealed will is the measure of our responsibility and

the determiner of our duty. With God's secret will we have nothing to

do: that is His concern. But, God knowing that we should fail to

perfectly do His revealed will ordered His eternal counsels

accordingly, and these eternal counsels, which make up His secret will,

though unknown to us are, though unconsciously, fulfilled in and

through us.

Whether the reader is prepared to accept the above distinction in the

will of God or not he must acknowledge that the commands of Scripture

declare God's revealed will, and he must also allow that sometimes God

wills not to hinder a breach of those commands, because He does not as

a fact so hinder it. God wills to permit sin as is evident, for He does

permit it. Surely none will say that God Himself does what He does not

will to do.

Finally, let it be said again that, my responsibility with regard to

the will of God is measured by what He has made known in His Word.

There I learn that it is my duty to use the means of His providing, and

to humbly pray that He may be pleased to bless them to me. To refuse so

to do on the ground that I am ignorant of what may or may not be His

secret counsels concerning me, is not only absurd, but the height of

presumption. We repeat: the secret will of God is none of our business;

it is His revealed will which measures our accountability. That there

is no conflict whatever between the secret and the revealed will of God

is made clear from the fact that, the former is accomplished by my use

of the means laid down in the latter.

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APPENDIX 2

THE CASE OF ADAM

In our chapter on God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility we dealt

only with the responsibility of man considered as a fallen creature,

and at the close of the discussion it was pointed out how that the

measure and extent of our responsibility varies in different

individuals, according to the advantages they have received and the

privileges they have enjoyed, which is a truth clearly established by

the declaration of the Saviour recorded in Luke 12 :47, 48, "And that

servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither

did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he

that knew not, and did not commit things worthy of stripes, shall be

beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him

shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him

they will ask the more".

Now, strictly speaking, there are only two men who have ever walked

this earth which were endowed with full and unimpaired responsibility,

and they were the first and last Adam's. The responsibility of each of

the rational descendants of Adam, while real, and sufficient to

establish them accountable to their Creator is, nevertheless, limited

in degree, limited because impaired through the effects of the Fall.

Not only is the responsibility of each descendant of Adam sufficient to

constitute him, personally an accountable creature (that is, as one so

constituted that he ought to do right and ought not to do wrong), but

originally every one of us was also endowed, judicially, with full and

unimpaired responsibility, not in ourselves, but, in Adam. It should

ever be borne in mind that not only was Adam the father of the human

race seminally, but he was also the head of the race legally. When Adam

was placed in Eden he stood there as our representative, so that what

he did is reckoned to the account of each for whom he acted.

It is beside our present purpose to enter here into a lengthy

discussion of the Federal Headship of Adam (Though there is deep and

widespread need for this, and we hope ere long to write upon this

subject in another book.), suffice it now to refer the reader to Romans

5:12-19 where this truth is dealt with by the Holy Spirit. In the heart

of this most important passage we are told that Adam was "the figure of

Him that was to come" (v. 14), that is, of Christ. In what sense, then,

was Adam "the figure" of Christ? The answer must be, In that he was a

Federal Head; in that he acted on the behalf of a race of men; in that

he was one who has legally, as well as vitally, affected all connected

with him. It is for this reason that the Lord Jesus is in 1 Corinthians

15:45 denominated "the last Adam", that is, the Head of the new

creation, as the first Adam was the Head of the old creation.

In Adam, then, each of us stood. As the representative of the human

race the first man acted. As then Adam was created with full and

unimpaired responsibility, unimpaired because there was no evil nature

within him; and as we were all "in Adam", it necessarily follows that

all of us, originally, were also endowed with full and unimpaired

responsibility. Therefore, in Eden, it was not merely the

responsibility of Adam as a single person that was tested, but it was

Human Responsibility, the Responsibility of the Race, as a whole and in

part, which was on trial.

Webster defines responsibility first, as "liable to account"; second,

as "able to discharge an obligation". Perhaps the meaning and scope of

the term responsibility might be expressed and summed up in the one

word oughtness. Godwards, responsibility respects that which is due the

Creator from the creature, and which the creature is under moral

obligations to render.

In the light of the above definition it is at once apparent that

responsibility is something that must be placed on trial. And as a

fact, this is, as we learn from the Inspired Record, exactly what

transpired in Eden. Adam was placed on probation. His obligations to

God were put to the test. His loyalty to the Creator was tried out. The

test consisted of obedience to his Maker's command. Of a certain tree

he was forbidden to eat.

But right here a very formidable difficulty confronts us. From God's

standpoint the result of Adam's probation was not left in uncertainty.

Before He formed him out of the dust of the ground and breathed into

his nostrils the breath of life, God knew exactly how the appointed

test would terminate. With this statement every Christian reader must

be in accord, for, to deny God's foreknowledge is to deny His

omniscience, and this is to repudiate one of the fundamental attributes

of Deity. But we must go further: not only had God a perfect

foreknowledge of the outcome of Adam's trial, not only did His

omniscient eye see Adam eating of the forbidden fruit, but He decreed

beforehand that he should do so. This is evident not only from the

general fact that nothing happens save that which the Creator and

Governor of the universe has eternally purposed, but also from the

express declaration of Scripture that Christ as a Lamb "verily was

foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20). If,

then, God had foreordained before the foundation of the world that

Christ should, in due time, be offered as a Sacrifice for sin, then it

is unmistakably evident that God had also foreordained sin should enter

the world, and if so, that Adam should transgress and fall. In full

harmony with this, God Himself placed in Eden the tree of the knowledge

of good and evil, and also allowed the Serpent to enter and deceive

Eve.

Here then is the difficulty: If God has eternally decreed that Adam

should eat of the tree, how could he be held responsible not to eat of

it? Formidable as the problem appears, nevertheless, it is capable of a

solution, a solution, moreover, which can be grasped even by the finite

mind. The solution is to be found in the distinction between God's

secret will and His revealed will. As stated in Appendix I, human

responsibility is measured by our knowledge of God's revealed will;

what God has told us, not what He has not told us, is the definer of

our duty. So it was with Adam.

That God had decreed sin should enter this world through the

disobedience of our first parents was a secret hid in His own breast.

Of this Adam knew nothing, and that made all the difference so far as

his responsibility was concerned. Adam was quite unacquainted with the

Creator's hidden counsels. What concerned him was God's revealed will.

And that was plain! God had forbidden him to eat of the tree, and that

was enough. But God went further: He even warned Adam of the dire

consequences which would follow should he disobey--death would be the

penalty. Transgression, then, on the part of Adam was entirely

excuseless. Created with no evil nature in him, with a will in perfect

equipoise, placed in the fairest environment, given dominion over all

the lower creation, allowed full liberty with only a single restriction

upon him, plainly warned of what would follow an act of insubordination

to God, there was every possible inducement for Adam to preserve his

innocence; and, should he fail and fall, then by every principle of

righteousness his blood must lie upon his own head, and his guilt be

imputed to all in whose behalf he acted.

Had God disclosed to Adam His purpose that sin would enter this world,

and that He had decreed Adam should eat of the forbidden fruit, it is

obvious that Adam could not have been held responsible for the eating

of it. But in that God withheld the knowledge of His counsels from

Adam, his accountability was not interfered with.

Again; had God created Adam with a bias toward evil, then human

responsibility had been impaired and man's probation merely one in

name. But inasmuch as Adam was included among that which God, at the

end of the sixth day, pronounced "Very good", and, inasmuch as man was

made "upright" (Eccl. 7:29), then every mouth must be "stopped" and

"the whole world" must acknowledge itself "guilty before God" (Rom.

3:19).

Once more, it needs to be carefully borne in mind that God did not

decree that Adam should sin and then inject into Adam an inclination to

evil, in order that His decree might be carried out. No; "God cannot be

tempted, neither tempteth He any man" (James 1:13). Instead, when the

Serpent came to tempt Eve, God caused her to remember His command

forbidding to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and of

the penalty attached to disobedience! Thus, though God had decreed the

Fall, in no sense was He the Author of Adam's sin, and at no point was

Adam's responsibility impaired. Thus may we admire and adore the

"manifold wisdom of God", in devising a way whereby His eternal decree

should be accomplished, and yet the responsibility of His creatures be

preserved intact.

Perhaps a further word should be added concerning the decretive will of

God, particularly in its relation to evil. First of all we take the

high ground that, whatever things God does or permits, are right, just,

and good, simply because God does or permits them. When Luther gave

answer to the question, "Whence it was that Adam was permitted to fall,

and corrupt his whole posterity; when God could have prevented him from

falling, etc", he said, "God is a Being whose will acknowledges no

cause: neither is it for us to prescribe rules to His sovereign

pleasure, or call Him to account for what He does. He has neither

superior nor equal; and His will is the rule of all things. He did not

thus will such and such things because they were right, and He was

bound to will them; but they are therefore equitable and right because

He wills them. The will of man, indeed, may be influenced and moved;

but God's will never can. To assert the contrary is to undeify Him" (De

Servo, Arb. c/ 153).

To affirm that God decreed the entrance of sin into His universe, and

that He foreordained all its fruits and activities, is to say that

which, at first may shock the reader; but reflection should show that

it is far more shocking to insist that sin has invaded His dominions

against His will, and that its exercise is outside His jurisdiction:

for in such a case where would be His omnipotency? No; to recognise

that God has foreordained all the activities of evil, is to see that He

is the Governor of sin: His will determines its exercise, His power

regulates its bounds (Ps. 76:10). He is neither the Inspirer nor the

Infuser of sin in any of His creatures, but He is its Master, by which

we mean God's management of the wicked is so entire that, they can do

nothing save that which His hand and counsel, from everlasting,

determined should be done.

Though nothing contrary to holiness and righteousness can ever emanate

from God, yet He has, for His own wise ends, ordained His creatures to

fall into sin. Had sin never been permitted, how could the justice of

God have been displayed in punishing it? How could the wisdom of God

have been manifested in so wondrously over-ruling it? How could the

grace of God have been exhibited in pardoning it? How could the power

of God have been exercised in subduing it? A very solemn and striking

proof of Christ's acknowledgement of God's decretal of sin is seen in

His treatment of Judas. The Saviour knew full well that Judas would

betray Him, yet we never read that He expostulated with him! Instead,

He said to him, "That thou doest, do quickly" (John 13 :27)! Yet, mark

this was said after he had received the sop and Satan had taken

possession of his heart. Judas was already prepared for and determined

on his traitorous work, therefore did Christ permissively (bowing to

His Father's ordination) bid him go forth to his awful work.

Thus, though God is not the Author of sin, and though sin is contrary

to His holy nature, yet the existence and operations of it are not

contrary to His will, but subservient to it. God never tempts man to

sin, but He has, by His eternal counsels (which He is now executing),

determined its course. Moreover, as we have shown in chapter 8, though

God has decreed man's sins, yet is man responsible not to commit them,

and blameable because he does. Strikingly were these two sides of this

awful subject brought together by Christ in that statement of His: "Woe

unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences

come (because God has foreordained them); but woe to that man by whom

the offence cometh" (Matt. 18:7). So, too, though all which took place

at Calvary was by the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God"

(Acts 2:23), nevertheless, "wicked hands" crucified the Lord of glory,

and, in consequence, His blood has righteously rested upon them and on

their children. High mysteries are these, yet it is both our happy

privilege and bounden duty to humbly receive whatsoever God has been

pleased to reveal concerning them in His Word of Truth.

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APPENDIX 3

THE MEANING OF "KOSMOS" IN JOHN 3:16

It may appear to some of our readers that the exposition we have given

of John 3:16 in the chapter on "Difficulties and Objections" is a

forced and unnatural one, inasmuch as our definition of the term

"world" seems to be out of harmony with the meaning and scope of this

word in other passages, where, to supply the world of believers (God's

elect) as a definition of "world" would make no sense. Many have said

to us, "Surely, 'world' means world, that is, you, me, and everybody."

In reply we would say: We know from experience how difficult it is to

set aside the "traditions of men" and come to a passage which we have

heard explained in a certain way scores of times, and study it

carefully for ourselves without bias Nevertheless, this is essential if

we would learn the mind of God.

Many people suppose they already know the simple meaning of John 3:16,

and therefore they conclude that no diligent study is required of them

to discover the precise teaching of this verse. Needless to say, such

an attitude shuts out any further light which they otherwise might

obtain on the passage. Yet, if anyone will take a Concordance and read

carefully the various passages in which the term "world" (as a

translation of "kosmos") occurs, he will quickly perceive that to

ascertain the precise meaning of, the word "world" in any given passage

is not nearly so easy as is popularly supposed. The word "kosmos," and

its English equivalent "world," is not used with a uniform significance

in the New Testament. Very far from it. It is used in quite a number of

different ways. Below we will refer to a few passages where this term

occurs, suggesting a tentative definition in each case:

"Kosmos" is used of the Universe as a whole: Acts 17:24 - "God that

made the world and all things therein seeing that He is Lord of heaven

and earth."

"Kosmos" is used of the earth: John 13:1; Ephesians 1:4, etc., etc.-

"When Jesus knew that his hour was come that He should depart out of

this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the

world He loved them unto the end." "Depart out of this world"

signifies, leave this earth. "According as He hath chosen us in Him

before the foundation of the world." This expression signifies, before

the earth was founded--compare Job 38:4 etc.

"Kosmos" is used of the world-system: John 12:31 etc. "Now is the

judgement of this world: now shall the Prince of this world be cast

out"-- compare Matthew 4:8 and 1 John 5:19, R. V.

"Kosmos" is used of the whole human race: Romans 3:19, etc.--"Now we

know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are

under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may

become guilty before God."

"Kosmos" is used of humanity minus believers: John 15:18; Romans 3:6

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you."

Believers do not "hate" Christ, so that "the world" here must signify

the world of unbelievers in contrast from believers who love Christ.

"God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world." Here is another

passage where "the world" cannot mean "you, me, and everybody," for

believers will not be "judged" by God, see John 5:24. So that here,

too, it must be the world of unbelievers which is in view.

"Kosmos" is used of Gentiles in contrast from Jews: Romans 11:12 etc.

"Now if the fall of them (Israel) be the riches of the world, and the

diminishing of them (Israel) the riches of the Gentiles; how much more

their (Israel's) fullness." Note how the first clause in italics is

defined by the latter clause placed in italics. Here, again, "the

world" cannot signify all humanity for it excludes Israel!

"Kosmos" is used of believers only: John 1:29; 3:16, 17; 6:33; 12:47; 1

Corinthians 4:9; 2 Corinthians 5:19. We leave our readers to turn to

these passages, asking them to note, carefully, exactly what is said

and predicated of "the world" in each place.

Thus it will be seen that "kosmos" has at least seven clearly defined

different meanings in the New Testament. It may be asked, Has then God

used a word thus to confuse and confound those who read the Scriptures?

We answer, No! nor has He written His Word for lazy people who are too

dilatory, or too busy with the things of this world, or, like Martha,

so much occupied with "serving," they have no time and no heart to

"search" and "study" Holy Writ! Should it be asked further, But how is

a searcher of the Scriptures to know which of the above meanings the

term "world" has in any given passage? The answer is: This may be

ascertained by a careful study of the context, by diligently noting

what is predicated of "the world" in each passage, and by prayer fully

consulting other parallel passages to the one being studied. The

principal subject of John 3:16 is Christ as the Gift of God. The first

clause tells us what moved God to "give" His only begotten Son, and

that was His great "love;" the second clause informs us for whom God

"gave" His Son, and that is for, "whosoever (or, better, 'every one')

believeth;" while the last clause makes known why God "gave" His Son

(His purpose), and that is, that everyone that believeth "should not

perish but have everlasting life." That "the world" in John 3:16 refers

to the world of believers (God's elect), in contradistinction from "the

world of the ungodly" (2 Pet. 2:5), is established, unequivocally

established, by a comparison of the other passages which speak of God's

"love." "God commendeth His love toward US"--the saints, Romans 5:8.

"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth"--every son, Hebrews 12:6. "We love

Him, because He first loved US"--believers, 1 John 4:19. The wicked God

"pities" (see Matt. 18:33). Unto the unthankful and evil God is "kind"

(see Luke 6:35). The vessels of wrath He endures "with much

long-suffering" (see Rom. 9:22). But "His own" God "loves"!!

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APPENDIX 4

1 JOHN 2:2

There is one passage more than any other which is appealed to by those

who believe in universal redemption, and which at first sight appears

to teach that Christ died for the whole human race. We have therefore

decided to give it a detailed examination and exposition.

"And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but

also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). This is the passage

which, apparently, most favours the Arminian view of the Atonement, yet

if it be considered attentively it will be seen that it does so only in

appearance, and not in reality. Below we offer a number of conclusive

proofs to show that this verse does not teach that Christ has

propitiated God on behalf of all the sins of all men.

In the first place, the fact that this verse opens with "and"

necessarily links it with what has gone before. We, therefore, give a

literal word for word translation of 1 John 2 :1 from Bagster's

Interlinear: "Little children my, these things I write to you, that ye

may not sin; and if any one should sin, a Paraclete we have with the

Father, Jesus Christ (the) righteous". It will thus be seen that the

apostle John is here writing to and about the saints of God. His

immediate purpose was two-fold: first, to communicate a message that

would keep God's children from sinning; second, to supply comfort and

assurance to those who might sin, and, in consequence, be cast down and

fearful that the issue would prove fatal. He, therefore, makes known to

them the provision which God has made for just such an emergency. This

we find at the end of verse 1 and throughout verse 2. The ground of

comfort is twofold: let the downcast and repentant believer (1 John

1:9) be assured that, first, he has an "Advocate with the Father";

second, that this Advocate is "the propitiation for our sins". Now

believers only may take comfort from this, for they alone have an

"Advocate", for them alone is Christ the propitiation, as is proven by

linking the Propitiation ("and") with "the Advocate"!

In the second place, if other passages in the New Testament which speak

of "propitiation," be compared with 1 John 2:2, it will be found that

it is strictly limited in its scope. For example, in Romans 3 :25 we

read that God set forth Christ "a propitiation through faith in His

blood". If Christ is a propitiation "through faith", then He is not a

"propitiation" to those who have no faith! Again, in Hebrews 2:17 we

read, "To make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17, R.

V.).

In the third place, who are meant when John says, "He is the

propitiation for our sins"? We answer, Jewish believers. And a part of

the proof on which we base this assertion we now submit to the careful

attention of the reader.

In Galatians 2 :9 we are told that John, together with James and

Cephas, were apostles "unto the circumcision" (i.e. Israel). In keeping

with this, the Epistle of James is addressed to "the twelve tribes,

which are scattered abroad" (1:1). So, the first Epistle of Peter is

addressed to "the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion" (1

Pet.1:1, R. V.). And John also is writing to saved Israelites, but for

saved Jews and saved Gentiles.

Some of the evidences that John is writing to saved Jews are as

follows.

(a) In the opening verse he says of Christ, "Which we have seen with

our eyes . . . . and our hands have handled". How impossible it would

have been for the Apostle Paul to have commenced any of his epistles to

Gentile saints with such language!

(b) "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old

commandment which ye had from the beginning" (1 John 2 :7). The

"beginning" here referred to is the beginning of the public

manifestation of Christ--in proof compare 1:1; 2:13, etc. Now these

believers the apostle tells us, had the "old commandment" from the

beginning. This was true of Jewish believers, but it was not true of

Gentile believers.

(c) "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him from the

beginning" (2:13). Here, again, it is evident that it is Jewish

believers that are in view.

(d) "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that

Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we

know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not

of us" (2:18, 19).

These brethren to whom John wrote had "heard" from Christ Himself that

Antichrist should come (see Matt. 24). The "many antichrists" whom John

declares "went out from us" were all Jews, for during the first century

none but a Jew posed as the Messiah. Therefore, when John says "He is

the propitiation for our sins" he can only mean for the sins of Jewish

believers. [16]

In the fourth place, when John added, "And not for ours only, but also

for the whole world", he signified that Christ was the propitiation for

the sins of Gentile believers too, for, as previously shown, "the

world" is a term contrasted from Israel. This interpretation is

unequivocally established by a careful comparison of 1 John 2:2 with

John 11:51,52, which is a strictly parallel passage: "And this spake he

not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that

Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but

that also He should gather together in one the children of God that

were scattered abroad". Here Caiaphas, under inspiration, made known

for whom Jesus should "die". Notice now the correspondency of his

prophecy with this declaration of John's:

1 John 2:2

John 11:51, 52

"He is the propitiation for our (believing Israelites) sins".

"He prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation".

"And not for ours only".

"And not for that nation only".

"But also for the whole world"-- That is, Gentile believers scattered

throughout the earth.

"He should gather together in one the children of God that were

scattered abroad".

In the fifth place, the above interpretation is confirmed by the fact

that no other is consistent or intelligible. If the "whole world"

signifies the whole human race, then the first clause and the "also" in

the second clause are absolutely meaningless. If Christ is the

propitiation for everybody, it would be idle tautology to say, first,

"He is the propitiation for our sins and also for everybody". There

could be no "also" if He is the propitiation for the entire human

family. Had the apostle meant to affirm that Christ is a universal

propitiation he had omitted the first clause of verse 2, and simply

said, "He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

Confirmatory of "not for ours (Jewish believers) only, but also for the

whole world"--Gentile believers, too; compare John 10:16; 17:20.

In the sixth place, our definition of "the whole world" is in perfect

accord with other passages in the New Testament. For example: "Whereof

ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel; which is come

unto you, as it is in all the world"(Col. 1:5, 6). Does "all the world"

here mean, absolutely and unqualifiedly, all mankind? Had all the human

family heard the Gospel? No; the apostle's obvious meaning is that, the

Gospel, instead of being confined to the land of Judea, had gone

abroad, without restraint, into Gentile lands. So in Romans 1:8:

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your

faith is spoken of throughout the whole world". The apostle is here

referring to the faith of these Roman saints being spoken of in a way

of commendation. But certainly all mankind did not so speak of their

faith! It was the whole world of believers that he was referring to! In

Revelation 12:9 we read of Satan "which deceiveth the whole world". But

again this expression cannot be understood as a universal one, for

Matthew 24:24 tells us that Satan does not and cannot "deceive" God's

elect. Here it is "the whole world" of unbelievers.

In the seventh place, to insist that "the whole world" in 1 John 2:2

signifies the entire human race is to undermine the very foundations of

our faith. If Christ is the propitiation for those that are lost

equally as much as for those that are saved, then what assurance have

we that believers too may not be lost? If Christ is the propitiation

for those now in hell, what guarantee have I that I may not end in

hell? The blood-shedding of the incarnate Son of God is the only thing

which can keep any one out of hell, and if many for whom that precious

blood made propitiation are now in the awful place of the damned, then

may not that blood prove inefficacious for me! Away with such a

God-dishonouring thought.

However men may quibble and wrest the Scriptures, one thing is certain:

The Atonement is no failure. God will not allow that precious and

costly sacrifice to fail in accomplishing, completely, that which it

was designed to effect. Not a drop of that holy blood was shed in vain.

In the last great Day there shall stand forth no disappointed and

defeated Saviour, but One who "shall see of the travail of His soul and

be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11). These are not our words, but the infallible

assertion of Him who declares, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do

all My pleasure" (Isa. 64:10). Upon this impregnable rock we take our

stand. Let others rest on the sands of human speculation and

twentieth-century theorising if they wish. That is their business. But

to God they will yet have to render an account. For our part we had

rather be railed at as a narrow-minded, out-of-date, hyper-Calvinist,

than be found repudiating God's truth by reducing the

Divinely-efficacious atonement to a mere fiction.

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[16] It is true that many things in John's Epistle apply equally to

believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Christ is the Advocate of the

one, as much as of the other. The same may be said of many things in

the Epistle of James which is also a catholic, or general epistle,

though expressly addressed to the twelve tribes scattered abroad.

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