



Monergism

TRUTH AND ERROR

HORATIUS BONAR

Truth and Error

by Horatius Bonar

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[General Principles](#)

[God's Will and Man's Will](#)

[Election](#)

[Predestination and Foreknowledge](#)

[The Work of Christ](#)

[Faith and Gospel](#)

1. INTRODUCTION

These letters are little more than fragments. They do not aim at a complete statement of the truth, or a systematic arrangement of it. It is only a few important points that they touch. To have extended them and embraced a wider range of doctrine would not have suited my design. I wished to warn you against some of the prevailing

errors of the time, lest you, being “led away... from your own steadfastness” should follow after the “diverse and strange doctrines” of these last days. So it was necessary to dwell upon those errors which have been most prominently advanced, and to open up those truths which have been most perverted and denied.

My appeal is to the Word of God. “What are the reasonings, or opinions, or inferences of men? What is the chaff to the wheat?” saith the Lord. Let the Bible decide each question. It is for this that I have appended to each letter a selection of passages at length.

The real question of the present day is just this, Is man a totally and thoroughly depraved being by nature? Is he ruined, helpless and blind, dead in trespasses and sins? Many other questions have arisen, but this is the central one. According to the views we entertain regarding this will be our views upon other points. It is upon the truth of this doctrine that the whole Bible proceeds. And so modify or abate or dilute the statements of Scripture on this point.

Man being thoroughly depraved in nature, is it possible, I ask, to save him without a special and direct intervention of the Father, Son and Spirit, in his behalf? In other words, can he be saved in any way which does not involve personal election by the Father, particular redemption by the Son, and direct, immediate, overcoming operation of the Holy Spirit? Or, putting the question in another form, using the language of science — given a totally depraved being, is it possible to save that being by any plan which makes the previous concurrence of his own will an indispensable preliminary, or which makes it necessary that he should take the first step in the matter of return to God? If you place the different errors of the day before you in this light, you will find that they all more or less deny or encroach on the doctrine of man’s original, actual depravity.

You will find, also, that the objections urged against God's sovereignty and man's helplessness, are just different manifestations of human pride — the pride into which Satan tempted Adam, "ye shall be as gods," and into which all his offspring have fallen along with him. Man will not consent to be nothing, that God alone may be all. And it is curious to observe that the objections urged against these truths are not passages of Scripture, but human reasonings — man's inferences and opinions. Take, as a specimen, the doctrine of God's sovereignty. We have passages broadly declaring this, but not one setting forth the opposite. How, then, do men contrive to deny this truth? They begin to reason and speculate upon it; and by means of certain inferences of their own, they try to make it appear inconsistent with other doctrines to which they attach great importance. They say, "Does not God invite the sinner to come to Christ, does He not tell us that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn and live? Now how can this be true if He is absolutely sovereign in His proceedings? We cannot reconcile these things together, therefore we must explain away the passages which assert God's sovereignty and electing will. They cannot be understood in their plain and literal sense; we must devise some other meaning for them which will accord with our ideas of God's love." So, pride of intellect, confidence in human reason, eagerness to establish one favorite doctrine and to make everything bend to it, supersede and overturn the Word of God. Scripture is not implicitly relied upon, unless borne out by the systems or the syllogisms of reason and the conclusions of man's poor fallen intellect.

Cleave, then, to the Word of God. Distrust your own heart, "lean not unto thine own understanding," but "receive with meekness the engrafted word." "The world by wisdom knew not God," and we must stoop to "become fools, so that we may become wise." The "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him ... because they are spiritually discerned."

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

“Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace” (Heb. 13:9).

You seem bewildered amid the opinions of the day, almost as much as you would be in the midst of a company where each spoke in a different tongue. The difficulty of judging what is truth seems to be increasing, instead of disappearing. You knew not what to think, nor which way to turn; in order to discover who is right, or where certainty is to be found; so many novelties stagger and amaze you. There seem to be good men on both sides, and that perplexes you still more. You long for peace amid the jar of these unruly elements, and for stability amid these shifting sands. Yet rest does not come. There is no end of change. One novelty begets another, and that in turn becomes equally productive. One error requires another to maintain it, this second must have a third or fourth to lean on. One false step leads to twenty, or perhaps to a hundred more. Who knows where all this is to end?

The changes are numerous. Every month produces some new doctrine, or at least some modification of the old. Fickle minds lie in wait for something new. As the edge of one novelty wears down, another must be provided in its place to keep up the unhealthy excitement. This fickleness becomes doubly fickle by being gratified; novelties multiply and the sore evil spreads. Men do not tremble at the thought of falling into error. To change opinions upon some casual impulse, or some shallow catch of argument, is thought but a light thing; as if falling into error were no great matter, instead of being a fearful calamity; or as if the entrance upon a truth were an indifferent occurrence, instead of being the occasion of deep and solemn joy. Many who but lately were high Calvinists are now Arminians of the lowest grace, passing through the different levels with the most singular facility and flippancy, as

easily and airily as the musician runs up and down the scale with the finger, or the voice.

How is all this, you will ask. It might be enough to answer that it is written, “In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud ... led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:1-10). “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

But let us inquire a little further. There seem to be chiefly three reasons for this: first, the souls are not at rest; second, the consciences are not at work; third, there is little “trembling at the Word.” I might refer to others, but these are the most prominent ones.

1. The soul is not at rest.

There is a resting place for the weary — deep and broad, immovable and sure — Jesus, the sin-bearing Lamb of God. But these unstable ones have not reached it. They speak much of it, talk as if they knew everything about it, as if none could state the gospel as freely as they. Yet it is manifest that they have not realized that stable peace which comes from the knowledge of the living Jesus. They are not at rest. And the mind cannot be at rest until the soul is at rest. It will always be making vain fetches after new opinions, in the hope that this or that new doctrine may perchance bring the peace which it has hitherto sought in vain. Be assured of this, that a mind not at rest bespeaks a soul not at rest. And whatever men may affirm to you about their assurance or their peace, if you see them ever on the watch, ever on the wing for some new opinion, you may be sure there is little rest within. In many cases it may be vanity, attachment to a sect, desire for proselyting others, or simply self-

will. But in most cases I have no doubt that it is really in quest of peace that these poor souls are stretching out their weary hands, ready to embrace anything that will fill the dreary void, and pour over their souls that settled calm and sunshine to which (in spite of all their profession) they are really strangers. They are not fastened to the anchor cast within the veil, or else they have let go their hold. And so they are drifting from place to place in quest of anchorage, but they are unable to find it. They try, by means of change, to allay the fever and fretfulness of an unsettled spirit, yet all the while they boast of their assurance, and perhaps censure you sorely if you cannot speak their language and assume their tone.

2. The conscience is not at work.

The conscience has far more to do in receiving or rejecting opinions than many suppose. It should stand like a sentinel at the door of the mind, to try all truth before it enters. A tender conscience is cautious and oftentimes very slow in admitting truth, and, on this very account, most tenacious in holding it fast. So, a child of God, with a tender conscience, is often slower in receiving truth than others. For it has to do with conscience in his case. It has to pass into the mind under a watchful eye, which fears to be rash and hasty and trembles at the thought of giving entrance to error. A conscience asleep, or seared, or secure, makes quick work. A specious objection is presented to some old truth, or a plausible argument in favor of some new opinion, and, forthwith, the former is thrust out, the latter taken in, without any resistance or delay, or trembling on the part of the conscience, or any light and guidance from God, sought and obtained upon the matter.

Nothing is more needed in our inquiries after truth than a watchful jealousy of a tender conscience. Yet how little there is of conscience at all in these last days! There is what is called independence of mind, or thinking for one's self, but there is no conscience. It is not waiting upon God for teaching. It is trusting in our own heart, and taking the guidance of our own eyes. It is not "ceasing from man,"

but the mere pretence of it. It is ceasing from one man in order to trust in another, from one age to trust in another, and that other perhaps the most deceitful of all — our own. So there is such running after novelty, such readiness to receive any plausible error, such self-willedness and headstrong precipitance of judgment, such high-mindedness, pride, censoriousness of others. There is so little thought of our own foolishness and fallibility, so slender a sense of the awful responsibility we are under to God, for what we believe for ourselves and propagate among others, as His precious and eternal truth.

3. There is little trembling at the Word.

It is a solemn thing for a man to be spoken to by God, the God of heaven and earth. Each word coming from His lips should be listened to and received with profoundest reverence. “The Lord hath spoken” is enough for us. There is no room for question or cavil where His voice is heard. Each word in the Bible is to be dealt with as a sacred thing, as a vessel of the sanctuary, not to be lightly handled or profanely mutilated, but to be received just as it stands. There may be passages difficult to reconcile, doctrines which apparently conflict with each other. But let us beware of smoothing down, of hammering in pieces, one class of passages in order to bring about a reconciliation. Let us be content to take them as they are. We shall gain nothing by explaining them away. God has spoken them. God has placed them there. They cannot really be at variance with each other. The day is coming when we shall fully understand their harmony. Let us wait till then, and meanwhile tremble at the thought of misinterpreting or distorting so much as one jot or tittle. Most assuredly we shall not bring about the agreement in any such way. We are only widening the breach and opening but new difficulties.

If I am asked, how can you preach a free gospel and yet believe in election, I answer, I believe in both and preach both because I find both in the Bible; I have no authority for preaching an

unconditional gospel but what I find in the Bible. And I have the same authority for preaching an unconditional, personal election. God has told me that both are true, and woe is me if I profanely attempt to mutilate either the one or the other. If one man refuses to take the simple meaning of “election,” another may refuse to take the simple meaning of “gospel.” And were I called upon to say which is the worse, the more profane of the two, I should say the former. I should indeed tremble at the thought of denying either election or the gospel, but I confess that I think the denial of the latter a less direct and less daring insult to the sovereign majesty of Jehovah. It would be a shutting out of His grace, a closing up of all the manifestations of His character which have come to us since Adam sinned. And it would be drawing a dark cloud over our eternal prospects — but it would not be taking the reins of government out of His hands; it would not be the usurpation of His throne; it would not be giving the right hand of fellowship to atheism.

But there is no need of any such comparison. Perhaps it was wrong to make it. I have done so, however, in order that you may be led to see that election belongs to the highest and most sacred order of truths — that it is not a doctrine to be concealed and muffled as if we were either ashamed or afraid of it. It is to be firmly held and faithfully preached, whether men will hear or forbear. Mere philosophy might tell men that, If there is a God, He must be absolutely sovereign in all things. Mere philosophy might expose the shallowness and selfishness of those who trample on God’s free will in order to establish man’s free will — even if theology and Scripture were silent on the matter.

Why do I preach a free gospel? Is it because reason has revealed it? Is it because I find it suits me best? No! It is because God has declared it. That is my sole authority. Why do I believe in election? Just because God has made it known! I may find that reason confirms this. I may see that there can be no really free gospel without ejection, but still my ground for believing it is because I find it most plainly revealed.

You can only get rid of election by getting rid of the Bible. And so you will find, among others who deny election and the work of Christ for His church, a great dislike of those passages of Scripture which allude to these topics. They pass them by, they turn away from them, they are angry if another even quotes them, though without a comment. Now I ask, Would they do and feel this way if they believed that these passages really contain the meaning which they put upon them? If these passages are quite in harmony with their views, why do they shrink from quoting them, or hearing them quoted? Is this not the plainest of all proofs that they feel that theirs is not the honest interpretation? Does it not show that they themselves are secretly persuaded that these passages do teach unconditional election and the absolute sovereignty of Jehovah? They feel that they have twisted them from their plain sense and that the mere reading of them is enough to expose their distortions. They feel that they have not dealt fairly with the Word of God and that their one-sided dealings cannot bear the light of day.

Let us learn to “tremble at the Word.” Let us take it plainly and honestly in its simple sense. Let us not be afraid of its apparent contradictions. Let us not think ourselves capable of reconciling and harmonizing all its declarations. We see here but through a glass darkly. The day of light and harmony is coming. All shall then be plain. God will solve our difficulties. Meanwhile, let us reverence every jot and tittle of His Holy Word. Let us trust our own hearts and reasonings less, God’s Word more. Let us not be so anxiously asking, How can this be? How can we reconcile God’s sovereignty with man’s responsibility? How can we harmonize the Spirit’s free agency with man’s free agency? Let us leave difficulties in the hands of God and let us beware of making those difficulties greater by our miserable attempts to reach at things too high for us, or our miserable efforts to pervert and mutilate the Word of God who cannot lie.

I do not mean, by any of these remarks, to imply that there is not the most perfect harmony between all the different doctrines taught

us in the Bible. Nor do I mean to say that this harmony is incapable of being discerned here. I believe on the one hand that all is harmony in the truths of God, and that harmony is discernible and demonstrable even now. But still there is an apparent jar. To a certain extent we can reconcile every one of the supposed discordances. Yet there are difficulties connected with them which no theory can solve, and which will remain difficulties till the great day. To attempt to reconcile or remove these by denying the plain and natural sense of Scripture is sinful and pernicious. It accomplishes nothing. It only takes away one difficulty to replace it with a greater one.

There are doubtless other causes of the evil over which we mourn, but these are the three chief roots of bitterness. To these may be traced more of the manifold errors of our day than many may be willing to allow. Till these are removed, I have little hope that the instability of our times will die out or cease to operate for the injury and subversion of the truth. Till the soul gets rest (not the name but the reality), and till the conscience is awake and sensitive — and till the Word of God is revered and honestly interpreted, I see little prospect of an end of these changes — if indeed we may venture to hope that such can be until the Lord comes.

Yet be not amazed, Jehovah changes not, neither does His Word. It abides forever, firm as the rocks of the earth, undimmed as the azure of the heavens. Seek to God for light and to His Word for wisdom. Take His Holy Spirit as your teacher. Do not heed the jar of man's warring opinions. Let God be true and every man a liar. The Bible is the Bible still. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God. You have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things.

Do not be alarmed, as if this were some new thing in the earth. Many speak as if the truth had never arisen among men until they arose to it. But the errors of the day are those of former times. They have shot up once and again and have been as often silenced — and put to shame. They are old and worn-out errors; though, perhaps,

more daringly set forth now than heretofore. For the time seems at hand in which “the earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard,” and when false teachers and prophets shall deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. Yet do not suppose the attainment of the truth to be a hopeless thing. “The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true.” It was He who taught the multitudes in the days of His flesh. If He teaches, all is true, all is blessed. Light and knowledge are with Him — and how willing He is that all the light and knowledge should be yours. “Learn of Me,” He said, “for I am meek and lowly.” And to what teacher can a foolish, erring soul take himself like this meek and lowly One, who can have compassion on the ignorant, and upon those that are out of the way? He received gifts for men, when He ascended on high, even for the rebellious. And to whom can you go, except to Him who has the Holy Spirit, with all His gifts and graces, so freely to bestow?

“Shall the clay say to Him that fashioneth it, What makest Thou? Or Thy work, He hath no hands” (Isa. 45:9).

Having stated what appears to me to be the origin of the theological opinions that are now trying to make way among us, I would briefly advert to some of the principles out of which they spring. I might at once have gone on to discuss the different points or opinions themselves, but I think it may be useful to notice some of the principles which they involve, or what may be called the general aspect and essence of these opinions. We have already seen the soil in which they flourish, we shall forthwith proceed to advert to the branches and fruit. But, before doing so, it may be well to call attention to the roots of the tree. Speaking generally of the new doctrines and the movement which has taken place in connection with them, we may affirm several things.

Man has too much to do with all this, God too little!

We hear much of what man does and can do and ought to do. But we by no means hear so much of what God is doing and has purposed to do. Man's agency stands very prominently out to view. God's arm and power are hidden. It seems almost as if man would thrust God aside, take the reins of government out of His hands and be to himself a god. Man gets much credit for doing and saying great things. God gets little glory. The position of the sinner, as a mere receiver of salvation (and every blessing connected with it in this life or the next), is denied. And man is exalted to be a co-operator with God in the matter of salvation. He begins the work by becoming willing, and God ends it. He does what he can, and God does all the rest. He is represented as helping God to save him. Or, rather we should say that God is represented as helping man save himself. In the old creation, God did it all. But in the new creation, as it is a far more stupendous work, He requires the assistance of man. Nay, He commits at least the most difficult and momentous part of it to man himself. If some of the new theories be true, God is not all in all, but is, on the contrary, considerably indebted to man — and man, in like manner, is not a little indebted to himself. In all this we hear still the whisperings of the old serpent, "Ye shall be as gods," and we see man, like his first father, aspiring to the Divine prerogative.

Man's way, not God's, is taken as the guide of action.

God has a way, a plan, a purpose, well and wisely ordered. This plan which He acts by, He has revealed, and He expects us to take it as our guide in all our schemes. This plan touches and rules things both great and small, nations, communities, churches, with all their movements. Man's wisdom would be to search out this plan, and to shape all his movements accordingly. In attention to this must not only lead to fruitless efforts and unscriptural schemes, but to much false religion, self-will, formality, excitement and sectarianism. God's design is to glorify Himself, to show the whole universe what an infinitely glorious Being He is. This is His mighty end in all He does and says, to manifest Himself and show forth His glory. For

this, sin is allowed to enter the world. For this, the “Word was made flesh,” for this the Son of God shed His blood and died. For this, He is taking out of this world a people for Himself. To this all things are tending, and in this shall they be consummated before long. Nothing less than this does God propose to Himself in His doings, and nothing less than this should we ever make our aim and end. All things are but means to this one end. Even the incarnation of His own Son is but means toward an end, but not the end itself. The ingathering of His chosen ones is the means, not the end. The salvation of Israel, the conversion of the world, and the restitution of all things in the day of the coming kingdom shall be the means, but not the end. “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things; to whom be glory forever.”

Whenever we overlook this, we go wrong and our efforts are but the beating of the air. When we make an end of anything lower than this, we are sure to fall into error. Because when we fix on ends of our own, we are certain to adopt means of our own. Take the case of the conversion of the soul: we cannot be too much in earnest about the saving even of one lost one. I believe we know almost nothing of that deep compassion and yearning love for a dying world, as saints, we ought ever to feel. Yet still it is quite possible to err in this matter, not in being too earnest, but in being so intent on having men converted that we lose sight of the mighty end for which this is to be sought. So the glory of God is hidden from view. And what is the consequence? We cease to look at conversion in the light in which God regards it, as the way in which He is to be glorified. We think if we can but get men converted, it does not so much matter how. Our whole anxiety is, not how shall we secure the glory of Jehovah, but how shall we multiply conversions? The whole current of our thoughts and anxieties takes this direction. We stop to look at both things together, we think it enough to keep the one of them alone in our eye; and the issue is, that we soon find ourselves pursuing ways of our own. Bent upon compassing a particular object, we run recklessly forward, thinking that since the object is right anything that can contribute towards the securing of it cannot

be wrong. We thus come to measure the correctness of our plans simply by their seeming to contribute to our favorite aim. We estimate the soundness of our doctrine, not from its tendency to exalt and glorify Jehovah, but entirely by the apparent facility with which it enables us to get sinners to turn from their ways. The question is not asked concerning any doctrine, Is it in itself a God-honoring truth, but will it afford us facilities for converting souls? Will it make conversion a more easy thing, a thing which a man may accomplish for himself and by himself? Will it make conversion less dependent upon God, more dependent upon man? Will it enable us to meet such a text as, "No man can come unto Me, except the Father ... draw him"; and, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you"; "Can the Ethiopian change his skin?" etc.

The man who thinks of nothing but how he may (as he calls it) get sinners converted is continually apt to take these devious courses. Impelled but by one force, in one direction, from one motive, he soon errs and loses himself in mazy thickets which, as he plunges on, thicken into deeper intricacy and darkness. Such texts as these present themselves and cross his path. Intent on but one thing, he either shuns them or treads them down. They are incompatible with his one idea, they seem to impede him in the pursuit of his one end. And therefore they must be done away with. It does not occur to him, Am I looking at objects in a partial light, from too low a position, and with a false bias which unfits me for coming to a right judgment? Were such a question asked and answered, as it ought to be, there would be less of one-sided doctrines, misshapen systems, gotten up to accomplish a favorite and engrossing object. Were the glory of the infinite Jehovah seen in its true light, as the mightiest and most majestic of all objects and ends, not to the exclusion of other matters, but simply to their regulation and subordination, then should we be saved the pain of seeing men rushing headlong over Scriptures and reason, striking out strange by-paths of their own, in their eager pursuit of an object on which they have fixed an exclusive and partial eye.

I do wonder at men who have either lost sight of the glory of Jehovah or have made it a subordinate object, or who think that if they can only get men converted then God will look after His own glory. I do not wonder at their being fretted when such texts as those I have referred to confront them in their scheme for facilitating conversion, their desire to make man the converter of himself. A man with only one object in view, and that not the highest, must be stumbled at such declarations and feel at a loss to reconcile them with others. But the man who has set his heart upon the glory of God and views everything in relation to that feels no such difficulty. He has no need to explain away even one verse or clause of the Book of truth. He enters into the purpose of God. He looks at things in the light in which God looks at them. He tries to see them as they might have appeared in the long past eternity — or as they might yet appear in the eternity to come. And he finds all harmony. There is no conflict, no discord at all.

One class of passages show him the yearnings of God's heart over sinful men. They show him that God is in earnest in beseeching men to come to Him. They show him that the sinner's unbelief is the cause of his damnation. They show him that the water of life is free — free to every man, free to every sinner as he stands — and that he is invited to partake, without price or preparation (not only although he is a sinner, but just because he is a sinner). They show him these things and in them he greatly rejoices. He does not wish to abate one jot of the blessed freeness, or cloud the joy of the glad tidings with even one restriction. No, but he takes these passages just as he finds them. He sees how suitable they are to one of the objects on which his heart is set — I mean the conversion of souls. But then he finds another class of passages which follow out another line of truth. They will run him up at once into the purpose and will of Jehovah as the fount and cause of everything great or small. They are quite explicit, just as much so as the other. He can not explain them away. They are so plain and simple that a child may see what they mean. He has no wish to take them in any other than their obvious sense. He sees in them exactly what meets his

own feelings and coincides with his view of God's glory as being the paramount and all-regulating end in all the movements of the universe. He does not see in them a restriction on the gospel, but the simple statement of an infinite truth — a truth not arbitrarily thrown across the sinner's path as a stumbling block, but a truth necessarily arising from the fact that God is God, the Creator, and that man is man, the creature, the sinner. The truth is just this, that God's will is the law of the universe, that His glory is the object and end both in creation and in redemption — His everlasting purpose the mighty and all-perfect mold in which all things are cast, and from which they take their shape and fashion from first to last. In such passages he sees God points out to men the true end which they ought to have in view, and by which all their movements are to be regulated. In them he sees God setting a fence and guard around His own majesty, lest men should imagine that their will is everything, their salvation God's only end, and that in the gospel He has thrown the reins of this fallen earth into the sinner's hands, telling him that everything depends upon his own will and power, that he has to put forth that will and power in order to save himself and restore a ruined world to its former perfection.

Whenever we lose sight of God's great end in all things — His own glory — we fall into a wrong track. We go wrong in judging of doctrine, we go wrong in the formation of our plans, we go wrong in the bent of our efforts. We miscalculate the relative importance of different truths. So our whole tone of feeling, judging and working is lowered and contracted. Zeal for our own ways and opinions takes the place of higher aims. A revival is gotten up to propagate these opinions, or to prop up a sect. Sectarianism and selfish exclusiveness steal in. Egotism, boasting, censoriousness are introduced. Religion becomes an instrument for working out our own views and ends. The most solemn and spiritual things are spoken of with levity and irreverence.

Conversion soon becomes the same as the holding of certain opinions. And the mark of an unconverted man is that he rejects

these opinions. Being loosened from their anchorage, men drift without a guide. One doctrine after another is embraced. Change succeeds change, as month follows month. To make conversion easy is the great object. And to accomplish this particular end, favorite passages are dealt with incessantly, doctrine after doctrine smoothed over, and Scripture after Scripture perverted or denied.

And after all this toil and change, what is the issue? Is anything gained? Nothing! Scripture has been perverted, man all but deified, and God all but dethroned — but has any difficulty been cleared off, have contradictions been harmonized? No. One class of difficulties has been substituted for another, that is all. The new system gets rid of the alleged contradictions of the old, only to substitute others of its own of a more serious kind. If, for instance, I deny that Christ is truly God, I certainly get rid of the mystery of the incarnation, but the passages which declare His divinity are numerous and explicit. In like manner, by denying the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of the sinner, I get rid of the old difficulties concerning man's responsibility, but I substitute for these most serious difficulties as to man's utter depravity, and as to the personal agency and operation of the Spirit. But the old difficulties are to some minds so stale and threadbare as not to be endurable. New difficulties recommend themselves by their freshness and novelty. To get rid of a single old one, some would welcome a hundred new ones.

From such roots many other evils spring, which I cannot enumerate here. There is often manifested a narrow-mindedness, a contraction of the spiritual eye, and limitation of the spiritual horizon, which is apt to end in engrossing selfishness. So we often see greater zeal to proselytize to a sect than to win men to Christ. We see great activity displayed in making known and forcing upon others the points on which the difference exists, and much less concern about propagating those in which all believers are agreed. We hear much talking about doctrines and peculiarities, little about Christ Himself. We find conversation turning too much upon the spiritual state of

others, and that often in flippancy or censoriousness — this one being pronounced unconverted, that one converted — this one being mentioned as having joined the sect, that one as being inclined to join it, or another as standing aloof. We find discussions arising as to whom this one was awakened under, or whom this other, as if this were a matter of any importance, provided the soul is saved and Jesus glorified. We find people extolling the exploits of their ministers, or the doings of their sect, numbering up the conversions that took place at this or that revival under this or that minister, in this or that village or town.

How much selfishness and sectarianism there is in all this! How little there is of simple zeal for the glory of the name of Jesus! A taste for religious gossip, in which the spiritual state of others is freely canvassed, criticized, and decided on, is a very different thing from that relish for the things of God and Christ which shows itself in the saint by the delight which he takes in spiritual converse on things pertaining to God and His glory, to Jesus and His love.

3. GOD'S WILL AND MAN'S WILL

“Cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in Mine hand” (Jer. 18:6).

Much of the present controversy is concerning the will of God — on this point many questions have arisen. The chief one is that which touches on the connection between the will of God and the will of man. What is the relation between these? What is the order in which they stand to one another? Which is the first? There is no dispute as to the existence of these two separate wills. There is a will in God and there is also a will in man. Both of these are in continual exercise. God wills and man wills. Nothing in the universe

takes place without the will of God. This is admitted. But it is asked, Is this will *first* in everything?

I answer, yes. Nothing that is good can exist which God did not will to be, and nothing that is evil can exist which God did not will to allow. The will of God goes before all other wills; it does not depend on them, but they depend on it. Its movements regulate them. The “I will” of Jehovah is the spring and origin of all that is done throughout the universe, great and small, among things animate and inanimate. It was this “I will” that brought angels into being and still sustains them. It was this “I will” that was the origin of salvation to a lost world. It was this “I will” that provided a Redeemer and accomplished redemption. It was this “I will” that begins, carries on and ends salvation in each soul that is redeemed. It is this “I will” that opens the blind eye and unstops the deaf ear. It was this “I will” that awakens the slumberer and raises the dead. I do not mean that, merely generally speaking, God has declared His will concerning these things, but that each individual conversion (nay, each movement that forms part of it), originates in this supreme “I will.” When Jesus healed the leper, He said, “I will, be thou clean.” So when a soul is converted, there is the same distinct and special forth-putting of the Divine will, “I will, be converted!” Everything that can be called good in man, or in the universe, originates in the “I will” of Jehovah (see James 1:17-18).

I do not deny that in conversion man himself wills. In everything that he does, thinks, feels, he of necessity wills. In believing he wills. In repenting, he wills. In turning from his evil ways, he wills — all this is true. The opposite is both untrue and absurd. But while fully admitting this, there is another question behind it, of great interest and moment: Are these movements of man’s will toward good the effects of the forth-putting of God’s will? Is man willing because he has made himself so; or is he willing because God has made him so? Does he become willing entirely by an act of his own will, or by chance, or by moral suasion, or because acted on by created causes or influences from without?

I answer unhesitatingly that he becomes willing because of another and a superior will — God's, that has come into contact with his, altering its nature and its bent. This new bent is the result of a change produced upon it by Him who alone, of all beings, has the right, without limitation, to say in regard to all events and changes, "I will!" The man's will has followed the movement of the Divine will. God has made him willing. God's will is first, not second, in the movement. Even a holy and perfect will depends for guidance upon the will of God. Even when renewed it still follows, it does not lead. Much more an unholy will, for its bent must be first changed. And how can this be, if God is not to interpose His power?

But is this not making God the author of sin? No! It does not follow that because God's will originates what is good in man that it must therefore originate that which is evil. The existence of a holy, happy world proved that God had created it with His own hand — the existence of an unholy, unhappy world proves that God allowed it to fall into that state — but it proves no more. We are told that Jesus was delivered by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). God's will was there. God permitted that act of darkness to be done. Nay, it was the result of His determinate counsel. But does that prove that God was the author of the sin of either Judas or Herod? Had it not been for the eternal "I will" of Jehovah, Christ wouldn't have been delivered up, but does this give proof that God compelled either Judas to betray or Herod to mock, or Pilate to condemn the Lord of glory? Still further, it is added in another place, "For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27-28). Is it possible to pervert this passage so as to prove that it has no reference to predestination? Does it make God the author of the deed referred to? Must God be the author of sin because it is said that Israel and the Gentiles were gathered together to do what His counsel had determined? Let our opponents attempt

an explanation of such a passage, and tell us how it can be made to harmonize with their theory.

It may be argued that God works by means in changing the will. It will be said that there is no need for these special and direct forth-puttings of His will and strength. He has ordained the means, He has given His Word, He has proclaimed His gospel, and by these means He effects the change. Well, let us see what amount of truth there may be in this. I suppose no one will say that the gospel can produce the alteration in the will so long as the will rejects it. No medicine, however excellent, can operate unless it is taken. The will of man then rejects the gospel, it is set against the truth of God. How then is it made to receive it? Granting that in receiving it there is a change, yet the question is, How was it so far changed already as to be willing to receive it? The worst feature of the malady is the determination not to touch or taste the medicine. How is this to be overcome? Oh! It will be said, this resistance is to be overcome with arguments. Arguments! Is not the gospel itself the great argument? Yet it is rejected. What arguments can you expect to prevail with a man that refuses the gospel? Admit that there are other arguments, yet the man is set against them all. There is not one argument that can be used which he does not hate. His will resists and rejects every persuasive and motive. How then is this resistance to be overcome, this opposition to be made to give way? How is the bent of the will to be so altered as to receive that which it rejected? Plainly by his will coming into contact with a superior will, a Will that can remove the resistance, a will like the one that said, "Let there be light!" and there was light. The will itself must undergo a change before it can choose that which it rejected. And what can change it but the finger of God?

Were man's rejection of the gospel occasioned simply by his misunderstanding it, then I can see how resistance could cease upon its being made plain. But I do not believe that such is the case. For what does it amount to but just that the sinner never rejects the truth. It is only error which he rejects, and were his mistake

rectified, he would at once embrace the truth. The unrenewed man then, far from having enmity to the truth (according to this view) has the very opposite! So little of depravity is there in his heart, and so little perversity in his will — such instinctive love of truth and abhorrence of error is there in him, that as soon as the truth is made plain to him, he embraces it. All his previous hesitation arose from the errors which had been mingled with the truth presented! One would think that this was anything but depravity. It might be ignorance, but it could not be called enmity to the truth. It is rather enmity to error. It would thus appear that the chief feature of the sinner's heart and will is not enmity to truth, but hatred to error and love of truth!

Man's heart is enmity to God — to God as revealed in the gospel, to God as the God of grace. What truth can there be in the assertion that all the sinner's distrust of God and darkness of spirit do not arise from his not seeing God as the God of grace? I grant that oftentimes this is the case. I know that it is very frequently misapprehension of God's merciful character, as seen and pledged in the cross of Christ, that is the cause of darkness to the anxious soul, and that a simple sight of the exceeding riches of the grace of God would dispel these clouds. But that is very different from saying that such a sight, apart from the renewing energy of the Spirit upon the soul, would change man's enmity into confidence and love. For we know that the unrenewed will is set against the gospel. It is enmity to God and His truth (Rom. 8:7). The more closely and clearly truth is set before it, and pressed home upon it, its hatred swells and rises. The presentation of truth, however forcible and clear, even though that truth were the grace of God, will only exasperate the unconverted man. It is the gospel he hates, and the more clearly it is set before him, the more he hates it. It is God that he hates, and the more closely God approaches him, the more vividly that God is set before him, the more his enmity awakens. Surely, then, that which stirs up enmity cannot of itself remove it. Of what avail, then, are the most energetic means by themselves? The will itself must be directly operated upon by the Spirit of God:

He who has made it must remake it. Its making was the work of Omnipotence; its remaking must be the same. In no other way can its evil bent be rectified. God's will must come into contact with man's will, and then the work is done. Must not God's will then be first in every such movement? Man's will follows.

Is this a hard saying? So some in these days would have us believe. Let us ask wherein consists the hardness. Is it hard that God's will should be the leader and man's will the follower in all things great and small? Is it hard that we should be obliged to trace the origin of every movement of man towards good to the will of God?

If it is hard, it must be that it strips man of every fragment of what is good, or of the slightest tendency to good. And this we believe to be the secret origin of the complaint against the doctrine. It is a thorough leveler and emptier of man. It makes him not only nothing, but worse than nothing, a sinner all over — nothing but a sinner, with a heart full of enmity to God, set against Him as the God of righteousness, and still more against Him as the God of grace, with a will so bent away from the will of God, and so rebellious against it, as not to have one remaining inclination to what is good and holy and spiritual. This man cannot tolerate. Admit that a man is totally worthless and helpless, and where is the hard saying? Is it hard that God's blessed and holy will should go before our miserable and unholy wills, to lead them in the way? Is it hard that those who have nothing should be indebted to God for everything? Is it hard, since every movement of my will is downwards, earthwards, that God's mighty will should come in and lift it omnipotently upwards, heavenwards?

If I admit that God's will regulates the great movements of the universe, I must admit that it equally regulates the small. I must do this, for the great depends on the small. The minutest movement of my will is regulated by the will of God. And in this I rejoice. Woe is me if it is not so. If I shrink from so unlimited control and guidance, it is plain that I dislike the idea of being wholly at the disposal of

God. And I am wishing to be in part at my own disposal. I am ambitious of regulating the lesser movements of my will, while I give up the greater to His control. And so it comes out that I wish to be a god to myself. I do not like the thought of God having all the disposal of my destiny. If He gets His will, I am afraid that I shall not get mine. It comes out, moreover, that the God about whose love I was so fond of speaking is a God to whom I cannot trust myself implicitly for eternity. Yes, this is the real truth. Man's dislike of God's sovereignty arises from his suspicion of God's heart. And yet the men in our day who deny this absolute sovereignty are the very men who profess to rejoice in the love of God. They are the ones who speak of that love as if there were nothing else in God but love. The more I understand of the character of God, as revealed in Scripture, the more shall I see that He must be sovereign, and the more shall I rejoice from my inmost heart that He is so.

It was God's sovereign will that fixed the time of my birth. It is the same will that has fixed the day of my death. And was not the day of my conversion fixed as certainly by that same will? Or will any but "the fool" say that God has fixed by His will the day of our birth and death, but leaves us to fix the day of our conversion by our own will. That is, He leaves us to decide whether we shall be converted or not, whether we shall believe or not? If the day of conversion is fixed, then it cannot be left to be determined by our own will. God determined where and when and how we should be born. And so He has determined where and when and how we shall be born again! If so, His will must go before ours in believing. And just because His will goes before ours, we do become willing to believe. Were it not for this, we should never have believed at all!

If man's will precedes God's will in everything relating to himself, then I do not see how any of God's plans can be carried into effect. Man would be left to manage the world in his own way. God must not fix the time of his conversion, for that would be an interference with man's responsibility. No, He must not at all fix it so that he is converted, for that must be left to a man and his own will. He must

not fix how many are to be converted, for that would be making His own invitation a mere mockery, and man's responsibility a pretence! He may turn a stray star into its course again by a direct forth-putting of power, and will be unchallenged for interference with the laws of nature, but to stretch out His arm and arrest a human will in its devious course, so as to turn it back again to holiness, is an unwarrantable exercise of His power and an encroachment upon man's liberty. What a world! Where man gets all his own way, where God is not allowed to interfere, except in that way that man calls lawful! What a world! where everything turns upon man's will, where the whole current of events in the world or in the church is regulated, shaped, impelled by man's will alone. God's will is but a secondary thing. Its part is to watch events and follow in the track of man's! Man wills — God must say, Amen.

In all this opposition to the absolute will of God, we see the self-will of these last days manifesting itself. Man wanted to be a god at the first, and he continues his struggle to the last. He is resolved that his will shall take the precedence of God's. In the last Antichrist, this self-will shall be summed up and exhibited. He is the king that is to do according to his will. And in the free-will controversy of the day, we see the same spirit displayed. It is Antichrist that is speaking to us and exhorting us to proud independence. Self-will is the essence of anti-Christian religion. Self-will is the root of bitterness that is springing up in the church — and it is not from above, it is from beneath. It is earthly, sensual and devilish.

5. *ELECTION*

“Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14).

“As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

You know what a prominent place in Scripture the doctrine of election holds. It meets us everywhere, both in the Old and New Testaments. Whatever may be the meaning of the word, one cannot help feeling that the truth which it expresses must, in God's sight, be a vitally important one. But how can this be the case if it means no more than God's choosing those that choose Him? If it means no more than God's choosing those whom He foresaw would believe of their own accord and by their own power, it is not worthy of the prominent place it holds in Scripture. Nay, it is not worthy of a separate name, least of all such a name as election. If there is any election at all in such a case, it is plainly not God's election of man, but man's election of God. So that the question comes to be simply this: Does election mean God's choosing man, or man's choosing God? It cannot mean both. It must be either the one or the other. Which of the two can any reasonable being suppose it to mean?

As the right understanding of this word is of great importance, I think it well to note down a few passages which will help to shed light on the meaning of the word: "The man's rod whom I shall choose shall blossom" (Num. 17:5). "Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose" (Deut. 17:15). "The place which the Lord thy God hath chosen, to put His name there" (Deut. 12:21). "For them the Lord thy God hath chosen to minister unto Him" (Deut. 21:5). Jerusalem "the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel" (1 Kings 11:32). "The Lord God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father to be king over Israel" (1 Chron. 28:4). "For the elect's sake whom He hath chosen" (Mark 13:20). "He is a chosen vessel unto Me" (Acts 9:15). "I know whom I have chosen" (John 13:18). "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" (2 Thess. 2:13).

These are but a few out of the many passages that might have been selected. But they are quite enough to show the meaning of the word. No one who wishes to take words plainly, as he finds them,

can find any difficulty in understanding what choosing or election means, after reading such passages as these.

I would ask, What does the word election mean in common speech? When we speak of the election of a member of Parliament, do we mean that he first chose himself, then the people chose him because he had chosen himself? Or when we speak of the election of a minister, do we mean that he first chose himself, then the people chose him because he had chosen himself? No such theory of election would be listened to for a moment in such matters. Election has but one meaning there. It means the people's choosing their representative by a distinctive act of their own; or the congregation choosing their representative by a distinct act of their own will. And shall man have his will, but God not have His? Shall man have his choice, but God not have His?

But let us take an instance from the Bible. What does God's choosing Abraham mean? He is a specimen of a sinner saved by grace, a sinner called out of the world by God. Well, how did his election take place? Did not God think of him long before he ever thought of God? Did not God choose him long before he ever thought of choosing God? Were there not thousands more in Chaldea that God might have chosen and called and saved if He had so pleased? Yet He chose Abraham alone. And what does the Bible call this procedure on the part of God? It calls it election! "Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees" (Neh. 9:7). Does anyone say, Oh, but God chose Abraham because He foresaw that Abraham would choose Him. I answer, the case is precisely the reverse of this. He chose Abraham just because He saw that otherwise Abraham would not choose Him. It was God's foreseeing that Abraham would not choose Him that made election necessary.

And so it is with us. God chooses us, not because He foresees that we would choose Him, or that we would believe, but for the very opposite reason. He chooses us just because He foresees that we

would neither choose Him nor believe at all, of ourselves. Election proceeds not on foreseen faith in us, but on foreseen unbelief?

The truth is, election has no meaning if it is not the expression of God's will in reference to particular persons and things. He says to each, You shall be thus and thus, not because you choose to be so, but because I the infinite God see fit that you should be so. To one creature He says, You shall be an angel. To another, You shall be a man. To one order of beings, You shall dwell in Heaven; to another, You shall dwell on earth. To one man, You shall be born in Judea, where My name is named and My temple stands. To another, You shall be born in Egypt, or Babylon, where utter darkness reigns. To one He says, You shall be born in Britain and hear the glad tidings. To another, You shall be born in Africa where no gospel has ever come. So He expresses His will, and who can resist it? Who can find fault, or say to Him, What doest Thou? Men may object at being placed thus entirely at the disposal of God, but the apostle's answer to such is, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (Rom. 9:20). Election, then, is the distinct forth-putting of God's sovereign will, for the purpose of bringing a thing to pass; which, but for the explicit forth-going of that will, would not have come to pass.

But does this not lead to the conclusion that sin is the direct result of God's decree? Does it not teach us that it is God and not man that produces sin? No. God does not foreordain sin, but He decrees to allow man to sin. God is holy and hates sin. He does not lead men into it; neither does He decree to lead men into it. But He decrees that, for infinitely wise ends, the creature should be permitted to fall, and sin to be perpetuated.

1. God forces no man to sin, either by what He decrees or what He does, either by commanding or constraining or alluring.
2. It is absurd to say that if we hold that God is the author of good, then He must be the author of evil — that if He from eternity

purposed to create what is good in man, He must therefore have purposed to create that which is evil. It is absurd to say that if I hold that it is God who sets my will right, then I must hold that it is God who set it wrong.

3. God frequently gave predictions of evil long before the time. Of course, then, if evil is predicted regarding either nations or individuals, then it must be fixed and sure. He predicted the curse on Canaan and his descendants. But does that prove that He was delighted in the curse, or that He was the author of it, or that those who were the instruments of inflicting it, and so fulfilling the prophecy, were guiltless?

4. Even our opponents admit that there are some events decreed beforehand, such as the birth and death of Christ, the Judgment Day, etc. If, then, they admit that He has decreed a single event they are in precisely the same difficulty in which they seek to fix us. If one event is decreed, why not all? Who is to draw the line and say, These are decreed, but these are not? God's will has already fixed one or two, and is man's will, or chance, to settle the rest?

In further explanation of this point, let me quote a few paragraphs from a tract which I published some years ago:

I know that the sinner must have a will in the matter too. It is absurdity to speak of a sinner loving, believing, etc., against his will, or by compulsion. The sinner must will, beyond doubt. He must will to take the broad way, and he must will to take the narrow way. His will is essential to all these movements of his soul. But in what state do we find his will at present? We find it is wholly set against the truth. Every will since the fall is wholly opposed to God and His Word. Man needs no foreign influence, no external power to make him reject the truth. That he does by nature. He hates it with his whole heart. When a sinner then comes to receive the truth, how is this accomplished? Does he renew himself? Does he change the enmity of his will by the unaided act of his will? Does he of himself

bend back his own will into the opposite direction? Does he, by a word of his own power, cause the current that had been flowing downhill to change its course and flow upward? Does his own will originate the change in itself, and carry the change into effect? Impossible! The current would have flowed forever downward had it not been arrested in its course by something stronger than itself. The sinner's will would have remained forever in depravity and bondage, had not another Will, far mightier than itself, coming into contact with it, and altered both its nature and course, working in the sinner "both to will and to do." Was the sinner willing before this other Will met his? No! Was he willing after? Yes! Then, is it not plain that it was God's will meeting and changing the sinner's will that made the difference? God's will was first.

It was God's will that began the work and made the sinner willing. He never would have willed had not God made him willing. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power." It is the power of Jehovah applied to us that makes us willing. Till that is applied, we are unwilling. It is His hand, operating directly upon the soul, that changes its nature and its bent. Were it not for that our unwillingness would never be removed. No outward means or motives would be sufficient to effect the change, for all these means and motives are rejected by the sinner. Nor does he become willing even to allow the approach or application of these means or motives till God makes him willing. To speak of his being changed by that which he rejects as is absurd as to speak of a man's being healed by a medicine which he persists in refusing. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (Jer. 13:23).

Then are all willing? Doesn't the depraved will remain in most, while the new will appears in few? What makes the difference? God's choice! "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?" (Rom. 9:21). "Except the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we

should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah” (Isa. 1:9).

Does God then hinder sinners from believing and willing? No, by no means. He hinders none. They are their own hindrance. “Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life.” Not one soul would be saved if left to his own will. But, in His infinite mercy, God does not leave them to their own wills. He puts forth His mighty power on some to make them willing. Were it not for this, all would be lost, for all would reject the Savior.

But is this not unjust? Is God dealing fairly with His creatures in making some willing and leaving the rest to their unwillingness? What! Are we to prohibit God from saving any unless He saves all? Are we to accuse Him of injustice because He leaves some to reap the fruits of their unbelief and delivers others from it? Is God unjust in saving whom He will, when all were lost?

Some are given to accusing us of making God guilty of partiality. As if they were singular in their zeal for God’s honor, they exclaim, We cannot bear a partial God. Partiality means, of course, injustice. It means also that the sinner has a right to favor from God. They must show, then, that for God to save some when all were lost is unjust. They must show that all sinners had a right to His favor, for if none had any right, there can be no partiality. But if this theory is true, then God was partial in not providing a Savior for fallen angels. He was partial in choosing Israel, and not choosing Egypt or Babylon, as the nation to whom He made Himself known. He was partial in sending prophets to Israel and not to Tyre and Sidon. He was partial in doing His mighty works in the land of Judea. And Jesus was partial in commanding His disciples not to go to either Gentiles or Samaritans. In short, if sovereignty is partial, then the Bible is full of it. And it would be just as well for these men to say at once what their theory implies — that God is not at liberty to act as He pleases, but can do only what man dictates.

But why does God save some and not all? Because such is “the good pleasure of His will.” He has infinitely wise reasons for this, though we do not understand them. Might we not with equal propriety ask, Why did He keep some angels from falling? And, Why did He allow others to fall? Or, may we not ask, Why did He not think of saving angels, why think of saving men alone? Is Jehovah not at liberty to do what He will with His own? Is He not at liberty to create as many worlds and as many beings as He pleases? And when these are ruined, is He not at liberty to redeem as many or as few as He pleases?

Are all men so depraved that they will not be saved unless God puts forth His mighty power? That is the real question in all this.

If so, then, it is plain that God must put forth His power to save everyone that is saved. And surely He is at liberty to choose whom He is to save. If indeed men are not totally depraved, then there is no need for the interposition of God’s hand either in choosing or in saving. But admit man’s total depravity and ruin, and you must admit the direct forth-putting of the arm of Jehovah. And so it is that many in our day are beginning to deny man’s total depravity of nature. They are smoothing down the expressions which do refer to it in Scripture, and claiming for man as much remaining power and goodness as will enable him in part to save himself, to do it without the interposition of God.

The following remarks of Calvin will show that in his day none but “Papist theologians” held the doctrine that God elects men because He foresaw they would believe. “The Papist theologians have a distinction current among themselves, that God does not elect men according to the works which are in them, but that He chooses those who He foresees will be believers. And therein they contradict what we have already alleged from St. Paul, for he says that we are chosen and elected in Him, ‘that we might be holy and without blame.’ Paul must have spoken otherwise if God elected us having foreseen that we should be holy. But he has not used such language.

He says, 'He has elected us that we might be holy.' He infers, therefore, that the latter (faith) depends upon the former (election). Those who think otherwise know not what man and human is." Such is the witness of Calvin against the Papal theologians; since that time many have joined the ranks of these theologians and glory in their heresies.

Oh, but it is said, we do not deny election. We merely maintain that God elected those whom He foresaw would believe. I answer, this is a total denial of election. And it is dishonesty or ignorance to call this by such a name. God elects those who He foresaw would believe, you say? And who were they? None! Absolutely none! He foresaw that none would believe, not one. And because He foresaw this, He elected some to believe. Otherwise not one would have!

With regard to the foreseeing who would believe, I have some difficulties to state: According to the Arminian theory, I may believe today and disbelieve tomorrow, according to my own will. I may thus go on believing and disbelieving alternately until the day of my death. God then one day foresees that I will believe, and He decrees to save me. But the next day He foresees me not believing, and He decrees that I should perish. How, in such a case, is the matter to be finally settled? Is it according to the state in which God foresees the sinner will be at the last moment of life? Or when? Let our opponents solve the difficulty, if they are able.

Oh, but some profane objector says, Does God make men to be damned? Let me in a few words answer the miserable atheism of such an objection.... It is somewhat remarkable that this is precisely the argument of Socinians, Universalists and Deists against the existence of such a place as hell. If you speak of hell or everlasting fire to such, their answer is, Did God make men to damn them? And however abominable and unscriptural their notion is, it is at least consistent with their own theory. Making God to be all love and nothing else, they think it inconsistent with His love that He should

allow such a place as hell in the universe. They do not believe in a hell, so they ask, Did God make men to damn them?

But let me answer the question, however profane it may be. God did not make men to damn them! He did not make the angels who “kept not their first estate,” to damn them. He did not make Lucifer for the purpose of casting him out of Paradise. He did not make Judas for the purpose of sending him to his own place. God made man — every man and every thing — to glorify Himself. This every creature, man and angel must do, either actively or passively, either willingly or unwillingly; actively and willingly in Heaven, or passively and unwillingly in hell. This is God’s purpose and it shall stand. God may have many other ends in creation, but this is the chief one, the ultimate one — the one which is above all the others, and to which all the rest are subordinate.

In this sense then plainly, God did not make men either to destroy them or to save them. He made them for His own glory. If the question is asked, Did God make the devil and his angels only to damn them, I answer, He made them for His own glory. They are lost forever, but does that prove that He made them to destroy them? He kept their companions from falling, and so they are called the “elect angels,” while He did not keep them. But does this prove that He made them to destroy them? They fell, and in a moment they were consigned to everlasting chains. He made no effort to save them, He sent no redemption to them. But does this prove that He made them only to destroy them? If ever such an accusation could be preferred against God, it must be in the case of the angels, to whom no salvation was sent. It cannot be said of man, to whom a salvation has come.

Whatever is right for God to do, it is right for Him to decree. If God’s casting sinners into hell is not wrong or unjust, then His purposing to do so from all eternity cannot be wrong or unjust. So that you must either deny that there is a hell, or admit God’s right

to predestinate who are to dwell there forever. There is no middle way between Calvinism and Universalism.

With these remarks I leave this point, and in doing so I would merely call your attention to one or two passages of Scripture which it would be well for those to ponder who put such a question as that to which I have given an answer:

“The Lord hath made all things for Himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Prov. 16:4).

“As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

“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.... What if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” (Rom. 9:17, 22).

Texts like these are not to be explained away or overlooked. They are part of God’s Holy Word, just as much as “God is love.” And if one class of texts is to be twisted or turned away from, why not another? Let us look both in the face, and let us believe them both, whatever difficulty we may find in reconciling them.

Our first duty is to believe, not to reconcile. There are many things which in this life we shall not be able to reconcile, but there is nothing in the Bible which we need to shrink from believing.

“For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12).

6. PREDESTINATION AND FOREKNOWLEDGE

“Being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11).

It is of some importance that we should settle the real nature of these two things, predestination and foreknowledge, to ascertain which of the two is first. The question is, Does God fix a thing simply because He foreknows it, or does He foreknow it because He has fixed it? There are vague ideas in man’s mind at these points. It is well to know the truth with distinctness. I answer, Predestination must be the foundation of foreknowledge. God foreknows everything that takes place because He has fixed it. In proof:

1. The opposite of this is an impossibility. To fix a thing is to make that thing certain to come to pass, which, but for the fixing would not have happened.... God knew all that might possibly have come to pass had He let the world alone to act out its iniquity. In all the infinity of possibilities, He saw that the thing He wanted was not to be found. Seeing the end from the beginning, He saw that the thing He desired would never come to pass unless brought into being by a direct act of His own will. No other will would desire or could effect that which He saw to be best, either in regard to persons or events. The thing He wanted was not to be found among the possibilities, but among the impossibilities, if matters were left to themselves, to the operation of the usual laws. How, then shall that which is impossible be rendered not only possible but certain? Evidently by the direct interference of God! God having thus interfered and arranged everything according to His wisdom, of necessity He must know them to come to pass. In other words, He foreknows everything because He has arranged everything. Everything is certain in His foreknowledge because it is so in His arrangements.

Take the case of a saved sinner, such as Saul of Tarsus. In looking forward from eternity, God saw that sinner. He saw him in his guilt and sin. He saw him hastening away from Himself, He saw that if left to himself, or to the usual laws of things, Paul would only go deeper into sin and farther from Himself. He saw that in such a case his salvation was impossible — that he never would believe and would never repent and turn. This was all that mere foreknowledge could tell. Foreknowledge alone can do nothing as to salvation. But here predestination comes in. God forms a design to bring man to glory, he is a “chosen vessel.” And having this design regarding him, He resolves to put forth His power, He prearranges all His plans concerning him, He fixes the day and the hour of his conversion, and so He foreknows its certainty — because He has fore-arranged it. Otherwise it could not have been known; nay, it would have been an impossibility.

2. The opposite of this is an absurdity. What can be more absurd than to fix a thing which I already know will come to pass whether I fix it or not? This is truly imputing foolishness to God. It represents Him as giving a solemn decree to fix a thing which is already certain. As if the queen of this realm should decree that the sun should rise tomorrow, because she knows that it will be the case, from the laws of nature. Is it not a mockery of God? It makes Him thus to speak, “I foreordain that a sinner shall be saved, because I foresee that he will be saved.” Unless, then, we impute folly to God, and affirm that there is nothing in the word *predestination*, we must admit that God must foreordain before He foreknows, and that He knows everything just because He has fore-arranged everything according to His own infinite wisdom.

There are two arguments which appear to me quite conclusive. But let us turn to Scripture. I do not need to again direct your attention to the passages which were quoted previously. But note two previously quoted, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). “For of a truth against

Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27-28).

1. The language is very explicit and plain. It is the strongest that could possibly have been used to denote foreordination. There is nothing about it ambiguous or hard to be understood. To take it in any other sense would be absurd. The doctrine may be inscrutable, but the words are plain. And is the nature of the doctrine a reason for refusing to take the words of God in their natural sense?

2. Admitting our views of foreordination to be true, could they have been expressed in language different from this, or from that employed in the Epistle to the Romans and Ephesians? Had we been left to choose our words for setting forth our views, we could not have desired any other than these. Can our opponents say the same? Are these words the most appropriate for expressing their views?

3. This determinate counsel is said to have fixed certain events in Christ’s history. Now, if some were fixed, we have reason to conclude that all others also were. Yet in the life and death of Christ we see nothing but what seemed outwardly to occur in the natural order of events. It will certainly be conceded that the will of the Son of God was free from first to last. Yet we learn that what He voluntarily did and suffered was also predetermined by God. In His case there was entire free will, yet entire preordination. What, then, becomes of the objection to predestination, arising from its supposed interference with the free will of moral agents? In Christ’s life and death we have a series of preordained events, and at the same time a series of free actions. And this is sufficient answer to the current objection. We may not be able to reconcile these things, yet they stand palpably before us.

4. This determinate counsel is said to have delivered up Christ into the hands of men. Pilate and Herod, etc., are said to have done what God's hand and counsel had predetermined. Here is something still more striking. The deeds of these wicked men are said to have come to pass according to this counsel, yet these deeds are no less wicked, and those men are no less responsible. Here, again, we have another objection answered, or at least silenced. To reconcile things may be difficult, yet the statement in this passage is plain. What pride and folly, then, are there in the questions and cavils which we so often hear in connection with this doctrine:

If God has arranged everything, man's will is not free, someone will say. How can the sinner be responsible? How can he be plied with motives and arguments? Of what use is it to do anything toward an end, if all is arranged beforehand by Another? How unjust it is in God to warn and invite sinners when He has fixed everything already! All these cavils have their answer in the passages quoted above. It is vain to think of putting questions such as these until these strong and explicit declarations have been explained away. They teach us plainly that our world's history is a history of events, preordained by God from eternity, yet at the same time coming to pass by the free agency of man. This preordination is the effect and the expression of God's will, yet it does not in the least interfere with man's responsibility. Nor does it suppose any violence done to the will of man.

It was certain that the ten tribes were to revolt, for it was predicted long before. But did it make their revolt less voluntary? It was certain that Christ was to be born at Bethlehem, but did that make the coming of His parents to that town less voluntary? It was certain that Judas was to betray Christ, for it had been predicted by David long before in the Psalms, but did that lessen the sin of Judas or make his act less free? In the same way I might go over every prophecy, and ask the same question. And I wonder greatly what our opponents would answer. How can they reconcile their ideas of free agency with the fact that the sin of Judas was predicted by the

Holy Spirit as certain, one thousand years before it came to pass? Was Judas a mere machine? Was God the author of his sin?

But it will be said, Are we not told that this election is according to foreknowledge? (1 Pet. 1:2; Rom. 8:29). In reference to the first passage, I would remark that the word *foreknowledge*, in the second verse, in the original is the same as that rendered *foreordained* in the twentieth verse. There can be no doubt that it means preordination, for it refers to Christ as the appointed Lamb. And if so, then, it is impossible to suppose that the word *foreknowledge* in the second verse refers simply to foreseeing and nothing more. But then we are asked to look at Romans 8:29, "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." The word *foreknow* means not simply to know before hand, but to fix the choice upon. The meaning is then evidently, "whom God set His choice upon, them He predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son." These saints were the objects of His eternal choice, they were appointed by Him to the honor of being made in the image of His own Son.

I wish to notice some concessions of our adversaries which appear to overthrow their whole system. They admit that in certain things there is a real election. They admit, for instance, that there is a real election of particular nations to particular privileges.

This admission is fatal to their theory. For their main prop was that the election of individuals was just another word for favoritism and injustice. Now, if the election of persons is unjust, that of nations must be more unjust. If the one is inconsistent with man's responsibility, so must the other be. If the election of men shows an undue partiality, much more must the election of nations. For God to reveal Himself to the Jews and not to the Egyptians is as much favoritism as for Him to convert one soul and not to convert another. He did far more for Israel than He did for any other nation. He brought them near Him. He gave them His Word. He taught them the way of forgiveness through the blood of the sacrifices. He

placed them in circumstances of peculiar advantage. He did not do this for Babylon or Nineveh, to Assyria or Egypt. Can it be wrong, then, to choose individuals, yet right to choose nations? Can it be wrong not to choose an individual to salvation, yet right not to choose a nation to those privileges through which alone salvation comes? Can it be right to pass by some nations and yet wrong to pass by some individuals? Nations are composed of individuals, and to choose a nation is to give individuals in that nation a peculiar advantage which issues in the eternal life of thousands. And so if there is any injustice in the matter, there is more injustice in a national election than in a personal one. It will be said, God knew what nations would reject His message, and therefore He did not send it to them. On this I offer this:

1. A nation being composed of individuals, our opponents must maintain that God foresaw that every soul in them would reject the truth. If not, would it not be hard, upon their theory for God to withhold the gospel from the whole nation, if He knew that some in that nation would have believed and been saved?

2. If these nations were denied the gospel, because God foreknew they would reject it, then they are condemned for a thing they never did, but which God merely foresaw they would do. Whole nations are treated as criminals, rejecters of the gospel, when the opportunity was never given them either to receive or reject it. I am not aware of anything in Calvinism so hard or unjust as this. We teach that God punishes men and nations on account of what they actually do, not on account of what He foresees they would have done if He allowed them the means. This theory, on the other hand, teaches that whole nations are condemned to that most fearful of all curses, a deprivation of the gospel, not on account of their actual sins, but because certain things were foreseen which they would have done! Now, if God can justly condemn nations on account of sin not committed, but merely foreseen as likely to be committed, why may He not condemn sinners to eternal death for sins never committed, but only foreseen? Would this be just? Strange that

men should maintain the justice of depriving nations of the gospel for sins which they never committed, yet affirm the injustice of God choosing a soul to everlasting life according to His sovereign will. But this is just one of the paradoxes of Arminianism. God chooses some to life, it is said, because He foresees they will believe. So that it is not faith that save us, but God's foresight of our faith. Nor is it actually unbelief that ruins us, but God's foresight of it.

3. God speaks of sending His messages to some who would reject, and of not sending it to others who were more likely to have received it, "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 an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee" (Ezek. 3:5-6). This surely settles the matter — it is not a nation's foreseen willingness to hear that leads God to send His messengers, nor a nation's unwillingness foreseen that prevents Him from sending. It is all according to His sovereign will.

It is affirmed that there is a work equally in the hearts of all men alike. It is said that God has done and is doing the very utmost that can be done for every individual of our race; and that to maintain anything else is to charge God with partiality and injustice, as well as to deny the responsibility of man. The proof adduced in support of these statements is a passage in Isaiah 5, "What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?" (v. 4). But it is remarkable that this is one of the strongest proofs that God did a great deal more for Israel than He did for any other nation. He allowed the whole world to remain a wilderness, but He made them His vineyard. He fenced this vineyard. He gathered the stones of it and planted it with the choicest vine. "He did not deal so with any other nation." Was this partiality or injustice? Or was this doing the same thing for all?

Besides, it is evident that this passage is being perverted. It doesn't mean that God at that time had done all He could for Israel. For He went on to do much more for them. Not only did He not cease to bless them, but He multiplied His blessings, and increased in strivings with them, long after He had uttered the words here. So that the passage cannot mean that He had done all He could, for He proceeded to do a great deal more, raising up prophet after prophet to give them line upon line. Nay, many of the most gracious words Israel ever heard were spoken after this time. If, then, the verse does really mean that God had actually done His utmost, the inference which is founded upon it falls to pieces.

It is plain, then, that God does more for some nations than for others. He did more for Israel than He did for Egypt or Babylon. He did more for Israel at one time than at another, for one generation than another; for one district of Judea than another; even for one individual than another. What else is the meaning of the words of Jesus, "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias ... but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:25-27)? Will any of the deniers of God's sovereignty furnish a solution of this passage? In accordance with their views, what can the Lord mean?

It is not true, then, that God does as much for one nation or for one individual as another. The opposite is and always has been the fact — a fact frequently referred to in Scripture as proof of God's right to do according to His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth (Dan, 4:35). No reasonings of men can alter the fact, nor can any ingenuity deprive the fact of its deep and solemn meaning. I may perhaps be told that the cause of this inequality is in the church of Christ, which has not done its duty. It is said that if Christians had acted aright, the world would have been converted long before now. As this is a common way of attempting to solve the difficulty, it may be well to answer fully.

1. Who told them that the cause is wholly in the church? Who told them that the world would have been converted before now if Christians had been what they professed to be? Give me one single passage of Scripture that states this. Surely it is a bold and hazardous assertion to make, without one verse of Scripture to support it.

2. It is not true. What! Shall such a mighty and majestic event as the salvation of the world be dependent upon a creature's will? Is it to depend upon man whether the world is to be converted or not? Has God no purpose to be carried out? Has He nothing at all to say in the matter? Is He to stand by looking on, wondering if it may please His people to put forth their energies to convert the world?

3. It is unscriptural. There are passages of Scripture which explicitly contradict it. What, for instance, does God mean when He gives as the reason why He enjoined Paul to remain and labor in Corinth, "I have much people in this city"? Again, what is meant by that similar passage, "And as many as were ordained unto eternal life believed"? Again, what did our Lord mean when He said (as if explaining the reason why so many rejected Him), "Many are called, but few are chosen"? Or what did He mean when He said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come"? And lastly, what did the Holy Spirit mean, first by forbidding the apostles to preach the Word in Asia, and then prohibiting Paul from going over to preach in Bithynia?

4. It is profane. It is saying that the wickedness of the world cannot be remedied by God, but only by the church; that God has no power to convert the world; that it is the church which has all the power; and that unless she pleases to put forth her might and zeal, God can do nothing for the world. Poor world! This is sad news indeed. Your destiny hangs on the power and love of your fellow sinners! The strength and love of your God are nothing and can do nothing for

you. Miserable comfort and miserable comforters indeed! Yet these are the men who speak so much of the love of God!

Yet I am far from saying that Christians are not much to blame. How little do the most zealous among us do for souls! How much more might we do by prayer, by labor and by holy living. Still, I deny that the inactivity or unbelief of saints will account for the darkness that overspreads the nations. Failure in duty on the part of the people of God may account for many things, but not for all. Did the prophets of old fail in their duty, and was their failure the reason why Nineveh, or Tyre or Sidon were not converted? Was it their fault that they were not sent to these cities and received no message for them?

Why were there so many prophets raised up within that small territory and not one commissioned to bear tidings to a dark and dying world? Could none be spared? Could no more be raised up? Did they refuse to go? Had God no message of grace to give them for the dark millions of Europe or Asia or Ethiopia?

Did the Son of God fail in His duty, in that He did not preach the gospel to any but the lost sheep of the house of Israel? Why did He make this distinction? Why did He never travel beyond the narrow Judean circle? Why did He command His disciples at first to make the same difference, prohibiting them from preaching the gospel in the cities of either the Gentiles or the Samaritans? Might not the Samaritans have said, You tell us that the utmost has been done for us that can be done, and that all are equally dealt with. Why then are we passed by? And why are the messengers of peace prohibited from entering our territory? What answer could be given except that such was the will and purpose of the only wise God?

Did the apostles afterwards fail in their duty when, after Pentecost, they went abroad to proclaim the everlasting gospel? Was their failure the reason why the world was not then converted? Are we not plainly taught that such was not the case? Why was it that when

Paul wished to go to Bithynia to preach the gospel there, the Spirit would not allow him to go? Was this doing the utmost for Bithynia that God could do? Nay, it was not even the utmost that Paul could have done and wanted to do. If the Spirit works at all, then it is plain that the reason why He succeeded in some and fails in others must either be one of the following reasons:

1. It might be because some have naturally better hearts than others, more inclined towards what is good, made of less rebellious and more believing materials. This better class of sinners, less stout-hearted than others, then could be said to yield and obey, and so are saved. The rest being more stubborn and ungodly, hold out and are lost! What hope does this give to the chief of sinners? Where in all this is there the plucking of brands from the burning?

2. Or, because the Spirit has attempted a work beyond His power He fails in His efforts. The sinner has overpowered Him and proved stronger than He. The sinner is able to overcome the Spirit, but the Spirit is not able to overcome the sinner. The Spirit has done His utmost and has failed.

But, finally, to say that the Spirit is doing all He can possibly do for the sinner is either a mere quibble, a play upon words, or else it is a most melancholy profanity. If it means that literally and truly Omnipotence has been tasked to the utmost and has failed in the attempt to convert a sinner, it is profanity. For it is saying that a creature is mightier than the Creator, able to withstand, nay, able to overcome Omnipotence. If, however, this is not said to be so, then what else can be the meaning but that God is doing all He sees fit to do for each individual? He is putting forth in each the utmost degree of power that His infinite wisdom sees fit. And if this is all that is intended, then there is harmony between us. For what is this but merely another way of stating Jehovah's absolute and all-wise sovereignty in giving or withholding blessing?

“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 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. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. 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. Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto Me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? 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? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering 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 — even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” (Rom. 9:14-24).

7. THE WORK OF CHRIST

“The church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood”
(Acts 20:28).

I do not intend to enter fully upon the subject of Christ’s work. This would require a much fuller discussion than I am able at present to bestow upon it. It would in fact require a volume of itself.

Christ is said in Scripture to have given Himself as a ransom and substitute for His church, and to have done so in a way such as He has not done for any other beings. This seems implied in the very first promise — the promise regarding the woman's seed. Here we have at the very outset the identifying work of Christ and His people — the setting them before us as entirely one with Him. His destiny and theirs are thus one from the beginning. We recognize here not only the Redeemer, but the chosen people, the people given Him of the Father, with whom He identifies Himself, and in whose behalf He is to die and to suffer — to bruise the serpent's head and to submit to the bruising of His own heel.

It is not merely Christ who is said to have died. His people are said to die with Him. The Apostle Paul very frequently dwells on this idea, representing the church as crucified with Christ, dying with Him, rising with Him, ascending up with Him and sitting with Him in heavenly places. In Jehovah's eye His people were with Him all the time, from His coming into the world. He stood in their stead, and they were viewed as one with Him from His cradle to His cross, and from His cross to His throne. They were taken up to the cross with Him. They died there with Him. They went down to the grave with Him. They came again along with Him. They ascended with Him. Now, I confess I cannot understand these expressions unless I believe in a definite number for whom all this was especially done. I cannot see how it is possible for the atonement to be indefinite, so long as I read that in all its parts the church was associated with Christ. This renders definiteness an essential element in the idea of redemption.

But how can there be any truth in all this if Christ has no special object in view in dying, except merely to render salvation possible to all, but certain to none? In that case He could only die as a man for His fellowmen — not as a substitute, not as a representative, not as a surety, not as a shepherd at all. I put it to you, which of these is most in accordance with the Word of God?

It is the view which would present itself to the eye looking from the past eternity into the future, contemplating the glorious issue. And it is the view which we hereafter shall more fully realize when we get into that eternity and begin to look back upon the whole finished scheme. Viewed from either of these points, the far past or the far future, the thing seems striking and vivid. Standing as we do in the present in the very midst of the scenes, with the smoke of the world all around us, seeing but darkly through the glass, we may find it more difficult to realize this. But faith can rise out of these dark elements below. It can transport itself to either of these eternal eminences. And, looking at things as God looks on them, contemplating results as He does, faith will be able to realize God's purpose regarding the church in all the different stages of its progress now, as if it had actually been represented in visible brightness, and the other parts which confuse us hidden from view. The moment the sculptor is hewing out his statue is not the best time to ascertain what he means. You must look at his designs, or you must wait until he has finished his work.

Here are some of the passages which represent Christ as doing a peculiar work on behalf of His church: "I am the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). "I am the good Shepherd and know My sheep and am known of Mine" (v. 14). "I lay down My life for the sheep" (v. 15). "Ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep (v. 26). "Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him" (John 17:2). "I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me" (v. 9). "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25).

In these passages we hear Christ repeatedly speaking of those whom He calls sheep, and telling us He gave His life for them — for them in a peculiar sense, as He did for no other. It is as a shepherd that He died with a shepherd's love and a shepherd's care — for His sheep as such. Again, He prays for His own, for those whom the

Father has given Him, not for the world. Can words be plainer? Here is certainly a distinction made, "I pray not for the world." Here at least is something peculiar to His church alone. And one such peculiarity is enough to answer the objections of adversaries. Is not the way in which He prayed an illustration of the way in which He died? Are not those for whom He prayed the same as those for whom He died?

But over against all this are set those many passages in which the word "all" occurs, as in "Christ died for all." Now the passages already quoted are more explicit and cannot be overthrown. They are too plain to be mistaken. Yet there are admittedly some difficulties with regard to some of the passages in which the word "all" occurs. But it is better to confess the difficulty and wait for further light than at once to proceed to do violence to the passage itself, or to make its difficulty a reason for doing violence to others.

With regard to the meaning of the word "all" in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, a few remarks will be necessary. It occurs there more than twelve hundred times. These twelve hundred texts may be subdivided:

Class One consists of a very large number of passages, several hundreds in which it is undeniable that the word cannot mean "all" literally. To give one or two specimens, we are told that "all the land of Judea... went out to him and were all baptized." This was certainly not literally the case, for every individual in the whole land did not come, for we are expressly told that "the Pharisees and lawyers were not baptized of him" (Luke 7:30). Again we read, "All men seek for Thee" (Mark 1:37). This was not literally so. Every individual in the human race, or even every individual in Judea, did not seek Him. Again, we have such passages as these, "He told me all things that ever I did" (John 4:29); "All things are lawful unto me"; "All our fathers were under the cloud"; "All they which were in Asia be turned away from me"; and, "Ye know all things."

Class Two consists of passages in which it is very doubtful whether all is literally universal. It may, or it may not be. There is nothing positively to determine it. “Every nation under heaven”; “All they which dwelt in Asia”; “The care of all the churches”; “All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him” (Acts 2:5; 19:10; 2 Cor. 11:28; Rev. 13:8), etc. These are specimens of a large class of doubtful passages, which, of course, can prove nothing as to the literal meaning of “all.”

Class Three consists of passages which are only determined by the context, not by the expressions themselves. The whole passage taken together fixes the meaning. But were it not for that, the literal meaning would have been doubtful. “All ye are brethren”; “All these things must come to pass”; “They all slumbered”; “When Jesus had finished all these sayings,” etc. In all these passages and in many similar ones, it is not the word “all” itself that points out the strict universality, but it is some other word that occurs along with it, such as “all *these* things.” In these cases, while in one sense the word has a universal sense, in another it has a limited one — limited by the words with which it is connected. It means all of a certain class, all of a certain number. So that we gather from these that when “all” is to be understood literally, we must learn from the context what the word means — whether it is all of one nation or all of another, whether it is all of one class or all of another. This answers at once the oft-repeated argument which consists merely in vociferating the word “all” as if the loudness or the frequency of the outcry were enough to demonstrate the meaning of the word. That meaning must be determined in each separate case by the other words, or parts of the passage.

Class Four consists of the passages in question, those supposed to imply a universal atonement. On these I cannot enter here. They are the fewest of all the four classes. Our opponents say they must be interpreted literally. Let us see how the proof stands.

Of the Scriptures in which the word “all” occurs, a large number are exceedingly doubtful. Another large number are only proved to mean literally “all” by the context. The fewest in number of these four classes are those which are claimed by our opponents.

The result of this statement is simply this, that the mere occurrence of the word “all” does not determine the question at all. Nothing but a careful examination of the whole passage can settle it. Do not then be deceived by the loud repetitions of the words — all and every — when intended to take the place of more solid proof.

It is impossible to do more here than to notice one passage, being one of the strongest and one that affords an admirable illustration of the need for looking at the context to determine the meaning of the word. It is, “He tasted death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). It is literally “for each,” since there is nothing about men in the original Greek. The question then arises, what does the apostle mean by “each”? The context must settle it. It either carries us back to the “heirs of salvation,” or forward to the “many sons.” For obviously it must refer to some of whom the apostle was speaking. Now, he was only speaking of the angels, and of the many sons, the heirs of salvation, and of no other. It cannot be the angels, therefore it must be the many sons, the heirs of salvation. They are the peculiar theme of the whole chapter, anyone following the apostle’s reasoning would naturally understand this expression to refer to them. It is straining it to refer it to any others. If it does refer to others, it might as well refer to angels (much more naturally so than of the world); for he is speaking of them, not of the world at all. The fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians is an illustration of this. The apostle is treating of the resurrection of the saints, not of the wicked. It is only by keeping this in view that his statements there regarding the “all” can be fully understood. So the “each” here referred to must be the “each” of those he was speaking of. And the singular used here is very striking, not simply the individualizing the saints, but as doing so in connection with the whole work of Christ. All that Christ did, He did for each! — His whole work, His

whole propitiation, His whole tasting of death belongs to each, just as much as if only one had been saved. The whole of what Christ did is the property of each saint. His work is not made up of so many parts, or extending to certain dimensions (greater or smaller according to the number of the saved) so that each of them gets a part of Himself and a part of His work. No, His work is such that each gets the whole of it — the whole of His glorious self, the whole of His glorious work. Each gets the benefit of His tasting death, as if endured for himself singly, alone.

Only a few hints have been thrown out to lead you, to establish you in the faith, to repel the objections of opponents. The real question before us is this, Was the atonement of Christ a definite or an indefinite thing? That is the essence and marrow of the controversy. It is upon this that the case of things hinges. There is a mighty difference between a definite and an indefinite work. Search the Scriptures and see if the language in which they speak does not necessarily imply something definite and certain — something which infallibly secured the object for which the Son of God took flesh and died, (which was, as you know, “to bring many sons to glory”).

“For the transgression of My people was He stricken” (Isa. 53:8).
“The church ...which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

8. FAITH AND THE GOSPEL

“For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom. 5:1).

Scripture presents faith to us in more aspects than one. It is sometimes called hearing, sometimes knowing, sometimes believing, or receiving, or trusting. Strictly speaking, it is simply the belief of the truth, yet it is referred to throughout Scripture under these different names. These may be said to be its different stages, and it is useful oftentimes to lay hold of it at each of these and contemplate it under each of these views. They are not in reality the same thing, yet they illustrate the same thing, they point to one object. The things we hear, the truth we know, the tidings we believe, the gift we receive, the Being we trust may be different in one sense — yet in another they are the same.

Some adopt one aspect exclusively, some another, so that the object itself is lost sight of. Some particular definition is fastened on and elevated to such prominence as to become little better than a party watchword (furnishing much matter for self-righteous pride and confidence).

One person glories in what he calls his simple views of faith, spurning every other idea of it but what he calls “the bare belief of the bare truth.” Ask such, “Where is your childlike confidence in God, where is the resting of your soul upon Jesus Himself as the resting place? You are making a savior of your faith, an idol of the truth. You are just as self-righteous and proud in your ‘simple views of faith’ as is the mystic whose religion you profess to shun. Your God seems to be a mere bundle of abstract propositions; your savior a mere collection of evangelical phrases, which you use as the shibboleth of a sect.”

Another goes to the opposite extreme overlooking the simplicity of faith. He undervalues the truth. He is wholly occupied with some mystical actions of his own mind, trying to exert himself to put forth some indescribable efforts which he calls “receiving and resting on Christ.” Say to such, “You are on the road to mysticism. You are occupied with your own self, with your own actions and feelings. You are making a savior of them. You certainly need more

simple views of true faith. You need to be called down from self-righteous perplexities about your own acts, to the precious word of truth which you are despising, as if it contained no comfort for you unless you are conscious of connecting certain acts of your own to it.”

From this you will see how it is quite possible to admit the full meaning of those words in Scripture which speak of confidence, and trust, and rest, etc.; while, at the same time, we rejoice in those other expressions which represent faith as an “acknowledgment of the truth,” and the salvation of the sinner as the result of his “coming to the knowledge of the truth.” It is quite consistent with Scripture to represent peace as flowing from confidence in God through Christ, and yet as rising from “believing the record which God has given of His Son.”

Without attempting to give a definition of faith, let me say in a few words that any faith which goes no farther than the intellect can neither save nor sanctify. It is no faith at all. It is unbelief. No faith is saving except that which links us to the Person of a loving Savior. Whatever falls short of this is not faith in Christ. So, while salvation is described sometimes in Scripture as a “coming to the knowledge of the truth,” it is more commonly represented as a “coming to Christ Himself.” “Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life”; “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.”

But whatever view of faith we take, one thing is obvious; that it is from first to last “the gift of God.” Make it as simple as you please, still it is the result of the Holy Spirit’s direct, immediate, all-quickenning power. Never attempt to make faith simple, with the view of getting rid of the Spirit to produce it. This is one of the most wretched devices of Satan in the present evil day. By all means correct every mistake in regard to faith, by which hindrances are thrown in the sinners way, or darkness thrown around the soul. Show him that it is the object of faith, even with Christ and His cross, that he has to do, not with his own actions of faith; that it is

not the virtue of merit that is in his faith that saved him, but the virtue and merit that are in Christ Jesus alone. Tell him to look outward, not inward for his peace. Beat him off from his self-righteous efforts to get up a particular kind of faith or particular acts of faith in order to obtain something for himself — something short of Christ to rest upon. Simplify, explain and illustrate faith to such an one, but never imagine that you are going to make the Spirit's help less absolutely necessary.

This is what the aim of the propagators of the new theology seems to be. Their object in simplifying faith is to bring it within the reach of the unrenewed man, so that by performing this very simple act he may become a renewed man. In other words, their object is to make man the beginner of his own salvation. He takes the first step, and God does the rest! He believes, and then God comes in and saves him! This is nothing but a flat and bold denial of the Spirit's work altogether. If at any time more than another the sinner needs the Spirit's power, it is at the beginning. And he who denies the need of the Spirit at the beginning cannot believe in it at the after stages — nay, cannot believe in the need of the Spirit's work at all. The mightiest and most insuperable difficulty lies at the beginning. If the sinner can get over that without the Spirit, he will easily get over the rest. If he does not need Him to enable him to believe, he will not need Him to enable him to love. If when a true object is presented to me, I can believe without the Spirit, then when a lovable object is presented I can love without the Spirit. In short, what is there in the whole Christian life which I cannot do of myself, if I can begin this career without help from God? The denial of the Holy Spirit's direct agency, in faith and conversion, is the denial of His whole work in the soul both of the saint and the sinner.

But is it not said, "Faith cometh by hearing"? Certainly. And who doubts the blessed truth? How can there be faith where there is not something to be believed? "There is an inseparable relation between faith and the Word, and these can no more be torn asunder from

each other than rays of light from the sun” (John Calvin). But does this mean that hearing alone is necessary to the production of faith? The words in the original explain this, “Faith arises out of what we hear, and what we hear comes to us through means of the Word of God.” Who then would say anything but what the apostle does here?, viz., that the foundation of the truth is what we hear (literally, a hearing, or a report). But does this exclude the Spirit from His work in preparing the soul for believing what it hears?

Having said this much as to faith itself, let a few words be added as to what it receives, “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” That which we preach, and which faith believes, “is the glad tidings of great joy.” It is God’s testimony of His own character, His declaration of His gracious mind towards the sinner, the utterance of His manifold yearnings over His lost and long-wandered offspring. That which we make known is the story of Divine love. We tell men that there is such a thing as love in God towards the sinful; that this love has found vent to itself in a righteous way, and that all are welcome to the participation and enjoyment of this love. We show them how God has opened up His heart to let them see what riches of grace are there; and how He has done a work on the earth by which we may measure the infinite dimensions of that gracious heart. This is the good news we bring, the tidings we present to the sinner to be believed, to be rejoiced in with joy unspeakable and full of glory. And this gospel is free, truly, absolutely, unconditionally free. It is without money and without price, making known the exceeding riches of God’s grace. This news shows us how these riches are pouring themselves freely upon all this fallen world. It shows that there is not only grace in God for sinners, but also that that grace has found vent to itself and is flowing down in a righteous channel to unrighteous man. It tells us that the darkness is past, that the true light has arisen upon the world. It tells us that the veil is torn from top to bottom, that every sinner may go freely in; that there is forgiving love in the bosom of the Father; that every sinner, without exception, is invited to avail himself of it. It points each wandering eye to the Cross, that it may

read there the Divine compassion towards the rebellious, the unholy. The good news comes to every man, inviting him to partake of all the fullness of God.

“Shall we tell men that unless they are holy they must not believe on Jesus Christ; that they must not venture on Christ for salvation until they are qualified and fit to be received and welcomed by Him? This would be a forbearing to preach the gospel at all, or to forbid all men to come to Christ. He is well qualified to come to us, but a sinner out of Christ has no qualifications for Christ but sin and misery.... Shall we tell people that they should not believe on Christ too soon? It is impossible that they should do it too soon. Can a man obey the command of the gospel too soon or do the work of God too soon?... If he should say, What is it to believe on Jesus Christ? As to this, I find no question in the Word, but that all did some way understand the notion of it. They all, both Christ’s enemies and disciples, knew that faith in Him was believing that the Man, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Son of God, the Messiah and Savior of the world, so as to receive and look for salvation in His name. If he still asks what he is to believe, you tell him that he is not called to believe in Christ, nor that his sins are pardoned, nor that he is a justified man — but he must believe God’s record concerning Christ; and that this record is, that God gives to us eternal life in His Son, Jesus Christ, and that all who with the heart believe this report and rest their souls on these glad tidings shall be saved.

“If he still says that believing is hard, ask what it is that makes believing hard for him. Is it unwillingness to be saved? Is it a distrust of the truth of the gospel? This he will not dare admit. Is it a doubt of Christ’s ability or goodwill to save? This is to contradict the testimony of God in the gospel.... If he says that he cannot believe on Christ, and that a Divine power is needed to draw it forth, which he does not find within himself, you tell him that believing on Christ Jesus is not a work, but it is a resting on Jesus Christ; that this pretence is as miserable as if a man who was weary from his journey, who was not able to go one step farther, should begin to

argue that he was so tired that he could not even lie down to rest — when in fact, he could neither stand nor go” (Robert Trail, Scottish preacher).

But I may be asked, How is all this freeness consistent with Christ’s substitution for His church alone? I answer that the gospel is not, “Christ died for the elect”; neither is it, “Christ died for all.” But it is, “Christ died for sinners.” It was thus that the apostles preached and that men believed. Any reader of the Acts of the Apostles can see this. They preached the glad tidings in such terms as these: “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). Or again, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (13:38-39).

The passage in 1 Corinthians 15:3 is often appealed to as a proof that the apostles preached everywhere that Christ died for all.... We have a full account of their preaching in this book of Acts, and nothing of the sort is stated there. But, in regard to this passage ... how is it possible to extort such a declaration out of it? The apostle went to Corinth. He stood up in a city of heathen. He cried out, “Christ died for our sins.” He did not say, “Christ died for all and everyone”; no, he did not say, “for your sins”; he simply said, “for our sins.” Now, not wishing to restrict the gospel, nor to make it appear as if it were not literally and actually for all but noting that the words here are plainly restrictive, we might expect to hear some caviling hearer in the way say, like some modern objectors, Oh! He does not preach the gospel. He says that Christ died for our sins, but he should have said that Christ died not only for our sins, but for the sins of all.

The man who lays stress on what he calls the gospel upon all, upon me, or on the other hand, upon the elect or the church plainly does not believe the gospel as the apostles did. And the man who, in believing, is turning his whole thoughts to these words, is going

aside from the tidings themselves. He is thinking of nothing but himself and the bearing of the gospel upon himself alone. He is losing sight of the glorious revelation of Himself, which God has made in the gospel; and he is only concerned about that part of it which he thinks includes his own salvation.

But how is this? You will ask. For the obvious reason that it is not with the work of Christ as a work done especially for myself that I have to do with in the first place in believing. But first, I must recognize it as a work which opens up to me the grace of God. It shows me that there is such a thing as grace, or free love to sinners. It is the pledge of its reality and the measure of its extent and dimensions. Whether we suppose it to be work done for many or few, still it is the declaration of God's free love, and it is that free love that is the sinner's resting place. The real question that troubles an anxious soul is in substance this: "Is there free love in God, free love reaching even to the vilest? Does He have such a free love that no amount of sin can repel or quench? Is there enough of free love to reach even to me and to remedy a case like mine?" The work of Christ settles all these perplexities, and yet in settling them it does not raise the question, "Was the work done especially for me?" any more than it raises the question, "Am I elected, or not?" It is the meaning of that work to which an inquirer has to look in the first place, not to its ultimate and particular destination. He who understands the character of God as the Lord God who is merciful and gracious will not be disquieted by the subtle suggestion of the evil one to ask, Am I elected? So he who understands the work of Christ, which is the grand exposition and opening up of the character of God, will never think of putting the question, "Was that work especially intended for me?" Apart from such a question, that work contains enough to remove all his fears.

MONERGISM BOOKS

Truth and Error by Horatius Bonar, Copyright © 2020

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of Monergism Books.

ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions April 2020 Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, Oregon, 97068