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SERMON VIII.

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THE DECREES OF GOD.

EPHESIANS 1:11. *Being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*

My design in the selection of this passage of scripture, is to make some remarks on what are usually called the **DECREES OF GOD**, or the **DIVINE PURPOSES**. This is a doctrine which is known to be peculiarly obnoxious to many. One reason of this, no doubt, is, because it is so imperfectly understood, as held by those who receive it as a doctrine of the Bible. Multitudes have never examined it in the light of God's word. They have contented themselves with the garbled and distorted statements of men who either did not understand it themselves, or who sought to promote sectarian interests by misleading others. For the fact is notorious, that neither the pulpit nor the press has been wanting in exhibitions of this doctrine, which would be rejected by its intelligent friends with as much abhorrence, as by those who made them.

It is admitted that the doctrine of the Decrees of God, is not free from difficulties. But is this an uncommon case? This will not be pretended. The same may be alleged of all the radical doctrines of the Bible. They have all their difficulties: or, rather, men make difficulties in their discussion, by departing from the simple statements of the word of God, and attempting what is beyond their depth and comprehension. And if on this ground the doctrine in question is to be set aside, on the same ground, all that is valuable in the Bible, and consolatory to the hopes of the Christian, must be also rejected. But are men prepared for this?

The object which we propose, therefore, at present, is to give a simple, scriptural exhibition of this doctrine, as we understand it to be contained in the Holy Scriptures, avoiding as much as possible all refined speculations which tend to bewilder, rather than enlighten the mind in its researches after the truth. Nor will it be attempted to enter into long trains of controversial discussion with those who hold different views. This would occupy too much space for a single discourse, and if necessary or proper, may be better done at another time, or by abler hands.

In the passage before us, the fore-ordination of Christians to the heavenly inheritance is affirmed. This inheritance, which Paul and his fellow christians had obtained, had become theirs on the ground of their being predestinated to its possession. To this predestination they were indebted for their participation in the blessings of salvation. It was "according to the purpose of God," and formed a part of that purpose. He had blessed them "with all spiritual blessings in Christ:" and that he had done "according as he had chosen them in him before the foundation of the world." The Apostle, while stating this fact in relation to himself and his fellow christians, that they were indebted to the purposes of God for their elevated privileges and hopes, affirms, moreover, that the purposes of this same God extend to all things. For these purposes, he declares to be the foundation of his acts: and as his acts extend to all things, so must his purposes from which these acts proceed.—"Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Beginning, then, with that which is more general, I remark.

I. That the Decrees or purposes of God **EXTEND TO ALL THINGS**. This is clearly taught in the text. God "*worketh ALL THINGS*." Here, we have the Divine acts [*"worketh"*] in the administration of his government. He works, or puts forth his power. And this administrative or providential agency extends to "all things"—so it is asserted in the passage before us. There is nothing to which it does not reach, and about which it is not concerned, for it is universal. Nor is this the only passage which speaks this language. Christ, in answer to the Jews who accused him for healing a man on the Sabbath day, says, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." John 5:17. In this declaration, there is a recognition of God's unceasing and continued agency in the management of the universe. There is no interruption of his providential acts; but he "*worketh*" on all days and without intermission. And as the Father worketh, so doth the Son.

They concur in will and operation, and of course, their agency is co-extensive. How *far* it extends is determined by the apostle in another place, where he represents the Son as "upholding *all things* by the word of his power." Heb. 1:3. *All things*, therefore, are the objects to which the Divine acts extend, and about which they are employed—examine also Dan. 4:34,35. Ps. 135:6. Acts 17:25,26,28. Job 38—39—40—41. Matthew 10:29—31. 6:26,30.

Indeed unless we admit the universality of God's providential acts, we shall find it difficult to maintain that they extend to anything. For the same arguments which would prove that any *one thing* might exist and operate without providential agency or control, would prove that *all* might: and thus an universal independency would be introduced into creation, totally subversive of the dominion of God, and incompatible with all just conceptions of the relations existing between creatures and their Creator. Few, however, I presume, are prepared to adopt this Atheistical absurdity, and withdraw our world and the universe from the dominion of Him who ruleth in the heavens.

I am aware that some who do not reject the providence of God altogether, tell us that when God created the universe, he impressed on it *general laws* for its government, and that these laws are amply sufficient to that end, without any particular and continued agency of God. That there are what are called laws of nature, I do not feel inclined to deny. But if these laws can operate without any agency of God, then they are independent of God. And if they are independent of God, they must have been so in the first moment of their existence. For that which is dependent in the first moment of its existence, must be so in the second, and the third, and so on as long as its existence is continued; as it is evident that no lapse of time or series of operations, can change the essential character of a dependent being, and clothe it with the attributes of independence. If therefore, the laws of nature were independent in the first moment of their existence, they must have been self-existent; for it is contrary to all correct notions of God, to assert that he could create a being independent of himself. But to affirm self-existence of the laws of nature, is to place them on an equality with God. It is to make them very God. This is the obvious and necessary result of maintaining that the laws of nature operate in the government of the universe, without any agency of the Creator. The scheme, therefore, which involves such impious absurdities cannot be true, but must be rejected as contrary to the word of God, and the established principles of all sound philosophy.

Allowing, therefore, the infallible correctness of the Apostle's language and doctrine, that God "worketh all things," I proceed to remark, that what is true in this respect of the divine acts, is true of the divine purposes. For the Apostle affirms that he "worketh all things *after the counsel of his own will.*" God acts according to a fixed plan. For, "known unto God are *all his works* from the beginning of the world." Acts 15:18. The operations of his providence, are only the evolutions of his purposes or decrees. The providence of God, therefore, being universal, his purposes must also be universal. His acts cannot be more extensive than his purposes of action. The one being universal, the other must be so too. For it cannot be endured for a moment, that an infinitely wise God should act without settled purposes, and that all the results of his providential agency should be fortuitous and contingent.

The declaration of the Westminster Catechism, that God "hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass," seems to be fairly sustained by this view of the text. If in the administration of the divine government there be any thing about which providential agency is not concerned, then there is something respecting which there is no purpose. But if the providence of God extends to all things, then *all* are the objects of divine decrees. For God "worketh all things, after the counsel of his own will."

Some explanation may be necessary here to avoid misapprehension. While it is asserted and believed that the decrees of God are universal, it is not maintained that they extend to all things in the same manner. There is a difference in relation to different objects. With regard to sinful actions, for example, the purposes of God are not concerned about them, in the same manner in which they are about holy actions. In holy actions God works by an immediate divine agency in their production. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Eph. 2:10. "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph. 4:24. Now, creation is a work of God which necessarily involves an exertion of divine power in its production. To such power, therefore, these "good works," and that "righteousness and true holiness" to which men are created by the Spirit of God, must be ascribed as the efficient cause.

But we cannot say that God thus creates sinful actions. He is not the efficient cause or author of sin, in the same manner in which he is of holiness. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, nei-

ther tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." James 1:13,14. But while it is thus certainly true that God is not the efficient author of sin, still both the agency and purposes of God extend in some form or other to sinful actions. "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. "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. Now the crucifixion of Christ which is referred to in these passages, was evidently a sinful act; yet it took place "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." In its accomplishment, the human agents concerned, did what God's "hand and counsel determined before to be done." Still God was not the author of the sin involved in that transaction. This is pointedly charged upon others. "Him—ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

As then, we have the revealed fact, that the purpose of God does extend to sinful actions, and yet that he is not the author of the guilt involved in these actions, we are obliged to believe that there is a difference in the manner in which he decrees acts which are sinful and those which are holy. The decrees of God in relation to these sinful acts, have been usually called *permissive*. Whatever exceptions have been taken to this term, it appears to us certain, that God does *permit* such actions, or they would not take place. If committed contrary to his permission, it would seem to imply a want of power to prevent or control them. They would possess an independency of character, which would place them beyond the restraints of Omnipotence. And if such be the fact, that God does permit sinful actions, I cannot see that there is either contradiction or absurdity, in saying that he decreed to permit them.

We arrive, then, at this result: *that the purposes of God extend to all things, but not in the same manner.* To *holy* actions they extend, so that he is their author, or originating cause: to *sinful* actions, so as not to incur their guilt, or make him their author. If you ask me, how can this be? I answer frankly, I do not know. Nor am I concerned to explain how it can be—It is enough for me that the fact is revealed. I would not be wise above what is written. And I have no doubt, but one great cause of the difficulties connected with the treatment of this subject is, that men attempt to explain what cannot be explained.

Let us take things as they are stated in the word of God, and cease to go beyond our depth, and we shall less frequently "darken counsel by words without knowledge."

And here, I would dispose of another difficulty in the same way. I refer to the common objection against the doctrine of God's decrees, that it is destructive of human liberty. To this I reply, by saying that both are revealed, that is, the purposes of God, and the free agency of man. How they consist, I am not concerned to explain. The fact, that they do so, is evident. The Jews and others who were concerned in the crucifixion of the Saviour, acted *freely*. This none will deny. At the same time, they acted in exact accordance with the "determinate counsel of God," though they intended it not. Now, the reason of this complex fact, involving the fixedness of the divine purpose, and the entire freedom of the human will, is not explained, and we must be content to take it as it stands in the word of God. The certainty of the event, arising out of the decree of God, destroyed neither the accountability nor the liberty of those engaged in this transaction. These remained free from all encroachment, while the counsel of the Lord stood firm and received its full accomplishment. Why, then, in the view of this fact, should men so positively assert that the decrees of God are destructive of human liberty? Is it certain that the decrees of God, and the liberty of man cannot consist, because the narrow intellects of men cannot comprehend or explain how these things can be? A proper degree of reverence for God's word will teach us to bow to its decisions, though we may not be able to fathom all their incomprehensible depths.

In addition to the universality of the divine decrees, it may be remarked here that they are *eternal, holy, just, wise, absolute, unchangeable and sovereign*. Various scriptures assign to them these attributes. The apostle Paul expressly mentions "the eternal purpose" of God. Eph. 3:11, also 1:4. Their holiness, justice and wisdom, are fairly deducible from these attributes in the divine nature. Examine the following texts in this connection, Rom. 11:33, Eph. 3:10, Rev. 15:3,4. Their absolute character is indicated in Romans 9:11.13.16.18. They are also unchangeable. "I am the Lord, I change not." Mal. 3:6. With God there "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Jas. 1:17. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Rom. 2:29. Heb. 6:17. Their sovereignty is often referred to. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes

even so; Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." Luke 10:21. Matth. 2:25,26. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?" Dan. 4:35. See, also, Ps. 135:6. At these particulars, however, we can only glance. I proceed, therefore, to notice,

II. THE DECREE OF ELECTION, particularly as it relates to men. "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men are predestinated unto everlasting life." Con. of Faith. Contemplating all men as fallen, God, "out of his mere free grace alone," determined to rescue some from destruction, and exalt them to glory. This election and predestination of men to eternal life, is taught in many places in the holy scriptures. Thus in the text, Paul and others are said to be "*predestinated*" to the inheritance which they had obtained—also, in Romans 8:29, "Whom he did foreknow; he also did predestinate," &c. The same is taught in Eph. 1:4, "*according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.*" Believers are also said to be called, "*according to the purpose of God.*" Rom. 8:28. Certain distinctions are made between man and man, "*that the purpose of God according to election might stand.*" Rom. 9:11. Hence the apostle, speaking on this subject, says, "*the election hath obtained it.*"—"So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." "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." Rom. 11:7. 9:15,16. The following scriptures are full to the same purpose; Rom. 9:22,23. 2 Tim. 1:9. 1 Thess. 5:9. 2 Thess. 2:13. Indeed the apostle Paul enters into an elaborate argument, in the ninth and eleventh chapters of the Romans, to prove this very doctrine. And it is difficult to conceive how any one can read Paul's epistles with but a small degree of attention, without meeting with this doctrine on almost every page.

The doctrine of the predestination of men to eternal glory, embraces *the means*, as well as *the end*. So it is stated in our Confession of Faith. "As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so he hath, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, *foreordained all the means thereunto.*" Chap. III, § 6. This is evidently the scriptural view of the subject. For the scriptures no where encourage the belief that men are appointed absolutely to eternal glory in heaven, without any regard to holiness of character and conduct. On the contrary, they always include in the appointment of God, the means of salvation, and the qualifications for its enjoyment, as well as ultimate salvation

itself. Thus men are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Eph. 2:10. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." 2 Thess. 2:13. And "whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Rom. 8:30. Effectual calling, therefore, and justification must, according to the decree of God, go before glorification. Men must become holy, and obtain deliverance from sin, through faith in Jesus Christ, before they can enter into glory. Such is the appointment of God. For Christians are "chosen in Christ, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love," Eph. 1:4; and they "are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation." 1 Pet. 1:5.

This view of the subject, (the only scriptural one,) completely refutes the common objection against the doctrine of election, that it leads to sin, and opens the door to licentiousness. It is often alleged, that if men are elected to eternal life, their salvation is secured, and they may live as they please. But this objection is founded in ignorance, or in a desire to pervert and mislead. Those who are appointed to eternal glory, are appointed to holiness, to faith, to a right use and improvement of the means of grace, with all that is necessary to final salvation, and that, in a way which does not impinge upon the liberty of the will. The decree of God in relation to their salvation, embraces all these. Indeed, these constitute a part of that salvation to which persons are chosen, and are necessary to its enjoyment. Such appears to have been the view of the apostle when he penned the following passage. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." 2 Pet. 1:10,11.

The election of a portion of the human family to eternal life, without any regard to their faith or holiness as the ground or reason of their election, is received by many with great abhorrence, and rejected as arbitrary and unsuitable to the character of God. Those who take this ground, affirm that God, contemplating all men as fallen, determined to provide a Saviour, in whom he would give to all sufficient grace for their salvation, and to save such as improved this grace to purposes of faith and holiness. Hence, they allege, that the election of persons to eternal life, always has respect to faith or holiness, foreseen in those who are its subjects, as the ground or reason of that

election. In other words, election is nothing more than the purpose of God to save such as he foresaw would make a wise improvement of the common grace given them in Christ the Redeemer. These are views which have long been entertained by many, and are still extensively prevalent among those who do not fully accord with the doctrines of grace.

But against the adoption of this scheme, there are several objections. 1. In the first place, it makes that to be the ground of the divine purpose, which the scriptures represent as its effect or consequence. According to Paul, persons are "chosen in Christ, *that they should be holy.*" Eph. 1:4. Here, the implication evidently is, that the subjects of this choice were, at the time of their election, contemplated as under sin and unholy, and that their holiness was a subsequent effect in view of the Divine mind in electing them to eternal life. Holiness, therefore, is the effect or consequence of the decree of election, and not its cause. Of course, the scheme which reverses this order, is at variance with the scriptures, and cannot be admitted as true. 2. Another objection to this scheme is, that it suspends the purpose of God upon the will of the sinner, and transfers the ground of salvation from God to man. For although, according to this hypothesis, God is supposed to have given to all sufficient grace for salvation, their election to eternal life, is made to depend on their improvement of this grace, for purposes of faith and holiness. Now, what is this, but to give the sinner the entire control of the purposes of God? It is, moreover, to make him the author of his own salvation; because, as already stated, it is on the ground of *his* foreseen improvement of the grace of God, that he is elected to eternal life. And what is the tendency of the doctrine which thus subjects the will of God, to the will of the creature? Is it not to nourish pride and self sufficiency, and encourage boasting in the sinner? thus subverting what the apostle has established, when he says, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2:8,9. For in the improvement of divine grace, which forms the basis of the decree of God, the sinner has a work whereof he may boast, and for which he is not indebted to the grace of God. And thus far, at least, salvation is of works and not of grace, contrary to what the apostle teaches. Will it be said that for his ability to improve the grace given him in Christ, the sinner is dependent on that grace? This, however, is to concede the whole question; for if it be grace communicated in Christ on the ground of sovereign mercy, which moves, inclines, or enables the sinner to improve its impulses for the atonement of faith and holiness, then the whole of

salvation must depend on the purpose of God to bestow that grace, and make it operative for these ends. Instead, therefore, of the decree of election being founded on the sinner's improvement of the grace given him, it is the decree of God which secures that improvement, and inclines and enables him to lay hold on eternal life. So that the scheme which would go to make God's purposes subservient to man's will, must be rejected as unscriptural and dangerous. 3. A still farther objection to this scheme is, that it is contradictory to itself, and to the holy scriptures. It is contradictory to itself. For while it contemplates all men as fallen, and indebted to the sovereign mercy and purpose of God for that sufficient grace which has been granted to every man in Christ, it makes the grace of God a debtor to man by suspending its successful operation, on the improvement made of it by the sinner. It is sufficient grace, and yet it is insufficient, until the sinner makes it sufficient by improving it for the purposes of salvation. It is also contradictory to the holy scriptures. They give no intimations of the purpose of God in electing sinners to eternal life, being founded upon any anticipated goodness in those who are the subjects of this choice. On the contrary, their language on this subject is, "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; therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy." Rom. 9: 15, 16, 18.

But it would occupy too much space to notice all that might be urged in opposition to this scheme. Besides, it would lead to the discussion of questions incidental to the doctrine which it is our business at present to establish. These few remarks may be sufficient to show, that the views of those who place the election of men to eternal life on other grounds than the divine sovereignty, or "mere free grace alone," are fallacious and unscriptural. The objection that this is an arbitrary ground, unworthy of God, proceeds from erroneous notions of the divine sovereignty. Men confound it with blind purpose—a purpose formed without reason, and which is totally regardless of the principles of right and wrong. With such views of the sovereignty of God, it is not surprising that they object to it, as having a control in the decrees of God in relation to men. Their mistake, however, must not be permitted to operate to the prejudice of the truth in the minds of others. "The sovereignty of God," to use the language of the venerable Dr. Scott, "is, I apprehend, a very different thing from arbitrary power: it is the sovereignty of infinite wisdom, knowledge, justice, truth, goodness, and mercy."—"God does

nothing without the best possible reasons, but he does not gratify the pride and curiosity of fallen rebels, by assigning his reasons to them. He doubtless has reasons for choosing a sinner to salvation, but the sinner's merit, or inferior degree of criminality, or more docile disposition, or *natural* voluntary concurrence with his grace, is not of the number of these reasons." Upon the whole, then, we are brought back to the plain, scriptural representation of this matter, that it was "out of his mere free grace alone," and for reasons known to himself, that God did, from eternity, elect a people to the enjoyment of everlasting life.

But as election implies the choice of some, from amongst others, what, it will be asked, has God done in relation to that portion of the human family who are not chosen to eternal life?

It has already been remarked, that in the formation of his adorable purposes of salvation, God contemplated man as fallen. To God all things were present from eternity. Before his all-comprehending mind, the creation and the fall of man, with all their circumstances were present. Beholding the whole human family, therefore, as fallen, and liable to death, he determined to save some, and "*to pass by*" others, "and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath *for their sin*, to the praise of his glorious justice." And what objection can there be to this? Are men sure that this is so inconsistent with the character of God, that it cannot be true? Let us examine and see how the case stands.

That by the fall, the whole race of man was rendered liable to wrath and condemnation, cannot be well doubted. "By one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."—"By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Rom. 5:12, 18. "And were by nature children of wrath, even as others." Eph. 2:3. Now this liability of the whole human family to condemnation and wrath, was either just, or it was not. If it was just, as we believe, then God might have ordained the whole human family, on this ground, to eternal misery, without any charge of injustice or cruelty. For there could be neither injustice nor cruelty in providing for the certain infliction of a punishment which was justly due to them on account of sin. And if God might have justly acted in this manner towards the whole, why not towards a part? The election of the other part to salvation, cannot alter *their* case. They are not less deserving of punishment after the others have been appointed to salvation, than before. Being still contemplated as under sin, they are justly, *on account of sin*, ordained to everlasting condemnation and misery.

But, it will, perhaps, be alleged that it would have been unjust in God to have consigned the whole of our race to perdition, without making provision for their salvation. If this allegation be well founded, then God was bound in justice to provide a Saviour; and the scheme of salvation, instead of originating in the infinite love of God, as the scriptures teach, was formed to meet the just claims which his creatures had upon his justice. What, according to this view, comes of the grace of the gospel? It is entirely destroyed. Salvation is no longer of grace, but of debt, as God owed it to his fallen creatures to provide for them a Saviour, and would have been unjust if he had not made such provision. But all this is so completely at variance with scriptural statements, that it cannot fail to secure its own rejection. The only legitimate conclusion then, is, that viewing man as fallen and guilty, God might in justice, have ordained the whole to wrath for their sin. And if there would have been no injustice in thus leaving all to perish, there can be none in leaving a part. If he might have done the greater, no possible reason can be assigned why he may not do the less.

From these remarks, you will perceive that we consider God merely as "*passing by*" those whom he has not elected to eternal life, and "*for their sin*, ordaining them to dishonor and wrath." In this God stands acquitted of all injustice. For is it not just, that God, foreseeing that man would fall, that without special grace he would go on in sin till death, should, *for his sin*, determine to inflict upon him the punishment it merited? As already shown, God was under no obligations to provide a Saviour, or to impart grace to convert the sinner, and fit him for heaven. His doing so, in the case of the elect, was a matter of *sovereign mercy*. They had no claim upon him for the blessings of salvation. And in reference to the enjoyment of these blessings they must all say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory." Neither have the others, who are not the objects of God's electing love, any claims upon God. All have been forfeited to his justice, and in the view of the divine proceedings towards them, they can only say, "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints—Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments."

Many passages of scripture support these views. "The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded."—"Therefore, he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."—"What if God, willing to show his wrath; and to make his power known, endureth 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."—"Because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." Rom. 11:7. 11:18,22,23. Matth. 11:25,26. See also Rom. 9 and 11, throughout. 2 Tim. 2:20. 1 Pet. 2:8. Jude 2:4.

These, and other passages of the word of God, shew that God, in the administration of his government, and the distributions of his grace, does *act* differently towards those who perish, from what he does towards those who are saved. And as the divine acts or operations, are only the evolutions of his purposes, he must have determined differently respecting them. We wish it to be distinctly recollected, however, that God exerts no positive influence on the wicked, leading them to sin. It is enough that he leaves them to their own hearts' lusts. They will of choice run the downward road to destruction, and be the executioners of their own sentence. The decree of God infringes not upon the liberty of their wills, nor does it exert any constraining influence over them. So that when they shall have received their final doom, they will only be made to "eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

Against the whole of this doctrine, according to which a part of mankind are elected to eternal life, on the ground of sovereign grace, and a part left to perish in their sins; it is frequently objected, that it involves unjustifiable partiality on the part of God, and that, for this reason, being inconsistent with his character, it ought to be rejected. To this I would answer, 1. That we are ignorant of the reasons by which God is governed in making this discrimination, and are, therefore, incompetent to pronounce in the case. That God, as an infinitely wise, holy, just, and merciful being, must have good and sufficient reasons for every purpose which he forms, cannot be doubted. To suppose the contrary, would be to divest him of all the high attributes of his character. Without a full knowledge, therefore, of all these reasons, of which God has not seen fit to put us in possession, it is arrogance to pronounce on the partiality or injustice of that which, as we have seen, the scriptures reveal. 2. If this objection be valid against the doctrine in question, it will be equally so against all distinctions, both in the natural and moral world, the reasons of which are not apparent to human discernment. But it cannot have escaped the observation of any one, that both in the natural and moral world, such distinctions do obtain. In nature, there is an endless diversity, the reasons of which do not appear. There, is the fruitful valley and the barren mountain, the beautiful rose and the craggy thorn, the innocent lamb and the ravenous wolf, with a thousand other varieties of a similar kind, all involving

the principle of sovereign discrimination on the part of the Creator. Why not, then, charge God with partiality in giving favorable distinction to some of these parts of creation over others?

But lest these natural distinctions should not be thought analogous, I remark that such distinctions are to be found in the moral world, and throughout God's intelligent creation. Look at the different *orders* of intelligent beings. Why these distinctions of men and angels, of cherubim and seraphim? What diversity, also, is there among men? in their outward worldly circumstances, and mental endowments? And, what is more directly to our purpose, what a difference in their religious privileges, deeply affecting their eternal interests? For many ages, the Jews had exclusive possession of the oracles of God and the means of salvation. And since the wall of partition between them and the Gentiles has been broken down, how few of the nations of the earth enjoy the light of the gospel? Now, whatever may be said about the sin of the church in not imparting the gospel to those who are without it, how does it happen that *we* have been distinguished by having it sent to us, while millions of the heathen world have been "passed by," and left to grope in darkness without a single ray of light to direct them to Christ? Who adjusted the plan, and directed the movement which put us in possession of these rich blessings, while no train of measures was put in operation, to give these same blessings to others who were without them? None will venture to say that the hand of the Lord has not been in this matter. Let men look at these facts. *Here* is one part of mankind, having no superior claims on the divine bounty, in possession of high spiritual advantages, tending to promote their eternal interests, and *there* is another part, entirely destitute of these advantages, and left exposed to sinful influences which jeopard the salvation of their immortal souls. Now in view of these facts, what shall we say? "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." Yet on the principles of those who make objection, we must either deny the facts altogether, or refuse to admit that the agency of God is concerned about them. Because, to admit the other, is to admit the sovereign right of God to make such distinctions among his creatures as he sees fit, though the reasons of his proceedings may be entirely concealed from us. The objection, therefore, against the doctrine of election, as involving undue partiality on the part of God, is refuted from known and acknowledged facts, which every where obtain, both in the natural and moral world, and in which the same principle of sovereign discrimination is conclusively established.

Having given this summary statement of the doctrine of God's decrees, I would, in the conclusion, 1. Warn men to beware of

the rashness of asserting, as is too often done, that this doctrine necessarily involves partiality and injustice on the part of Jehovah towards our fallen race. If the facts be as we have stated them from the word of God, it cannot be less than presumptuous thus boldly to pronounce in relation to this deep mystery. "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?"—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right."

What, though men cannot understand this doctrine in all its mysterious depths? The facts in the case are sufficiently evident. These are all that God has seen fit to reveal. These we are bound to believe on the credit of the divine testimony, instead of rashly arraigning the justice of God, or refusing to acknowledge his sovereignty. The language of God to Job is here applicable. "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters." That God must have purposes cannot be denied, without divesting him of his wisdom and intelligence. That there is much of sovereignty in these purposes, the scriptures plainly indicate. The admission of this sovereignty, however, is that against which the pride of the human heart makes vigorous resistance. And here, perhaps, after all, is where the greatest difficulty lies. Men find it hard to allow that God has a right to act as a sovereign in his own dominions, without "giving an account of any of his matters," to those who cannot comprehend the justice of his proceedings. And when this justice is not apparent, though the fault may be in their own defect of vision, they invade the prerogatives of Jehovah, and practically disavow their belief in the decision of God's word, which affirms that "the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." Against such rashness men should guard. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways, saith the Lord."

2. Men should also guard against abusing the doctrine of the decrees, by continuing in sin. Although the decree of God is the procuring cause of all good in man, it is not the cause of sin. This belongs to man. God has decreed to punish sin, to consign to eternal misery every transgressor of his law, who lives and dies in impenitence. But he has not decreed to exert any causal influence in the production of their sinful dispositions, or their courses of transgression. The guilt of sin, therefore, rests with the sinner; the punishment of that guilt will find its certain infliction in the decree of God. The decree of God, therefore, furnishes no excuse for sin, nor any encouragement to its commission. On the contrary, it gives alarming prominence and certainty to the miserable end of the sinner, by assuring him of the disastrous issue of a sinful course. This assurance of dis-

honor and wrath for their sins, ought to serve as a powerful motive to drive men from sin, and engage them to escape to the blood of the Saviour for deliverance from its curse.

3. The doctrine of the divine decrees should be improved for our encouragement in duty. God has chosen his people to salvation. He has also chosen them that they should be holy. Hence, they ought to seek for holiness, that they may enjoy salvation. Every holy aspiration, every believing prayer, every pious effort which they make, may be traced to the divine decree, and considered as among its gracious results. When, therefore, we exercise any holy dispositions, or perform any holy acts, we are hereby furnished with evidence that we are in the chosen way of salvation, and are encouraged to hope, that in the use of the appointed means, God will carry us forward to eternal life. Indeed I can hardly conceive of a stronger motive to holiness than that arising out of the purpose of God. If we are appointed to holiness, and holiness constitutes a part of salvation, we should exert every nerve that in our hearts and lives we may have evidence that the divine purpose is receiving its accomplishment. For the decree of God, it will be recollected, does not in any way conflict with man's free-agency. This remains entire. The liberty of the will suffers no restraint from the purpose of God. On the contrary, it finds in this purpose, an additional excitement to duty, and the attainment of eternal salvation. Hence we should exert ourselves, in the use of all our powers, that we may be holy, recollecting that to this God's people are chosen, and that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

4. Finally, let it be recollected, that it is the commands of God, which form the rule of duty, and not his decrees. His decrees form a rule of action to himself, but not unto us, farther than they may be exhibited in his commands. Now the commands of God are, that we repent, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and obey the gospel. These are matters of vital importance. To these, then, we ought to attend. It is our duty, to which we are bound by the most solemn obligations. As far as God has revealed his purposes, let us honor the truth by believing it, however high and mysterious. But whatever the purposes of God may be, the command of God makes it the duty of all to repent of their sins and seek pardon by faith in the atoning blood of a crucified Saviour. The decrees of God exert no influence to prevent men from complying with these demands. Pray, then, that you may be enabled to comply with the commands of God, and the calls of the gospel. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure."—And may the God of all grace bless, and assist, and save you, for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen!