

THE  
AMERICAN PREACHER;  
OR A  
COLLECTION OF SERMONS  
FROM SOME OF THE  
MOST EMINENT PREACHERS,  
NOW LIVING  
IN THE UNITED STATES,  
OF  
DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS  
IN THE  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

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# S E R M O N LXXVII.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY in CONFERRING  
MEANS and GRACE.

BY

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Rom. ix. 21.

*Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?*

**S**T. Paul had plainly asserted, and largely proved, in this epistle, that justification and salvation were only to be obtained by faith in Christ, and not by the law. In the beginning of this chapter he expresseth his great and tender concern for the jewish nation, who so generally rejected Christ. *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israel-*

*ites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.*

Here it is observable, that among many great favors conferred upon that people, he mentions the *promises*. The promises were made to Abraham and his seed, called afterwards the *Israel* of God. The great fundamental promise was, *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee.*

St Paul, as he intended and did largely treat of the rejection of the Jews, and calling of the Gentiles to be the people of God, gives a distinct answer to sundry objections that might be made to the divine conduct and faithfulness in this matter.

First, With respect to the promises, and particularly the great one before mentioned, *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee.* It might be objected, This promise was not fulfilled, for great numbers of them had perished; and if the Jews were to be rejected, many more would perish.

To this the apostle says, they were not to conceive the word of God had taken no effect, or that God was unfaithful. *For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel; neither because they are of the seed of Abraham, are they all children.*

Thus he teacheth, what is also plainly asserted in other parts of holy writ, viz. That *they* are of the seed of Abraham, in the most important sense, who are made partakers of Abraham's faith, and that these, and these only, are intituled to the saving, spiritual blessings promised to Abraham and to his seed: To these God has promised to be *their God* in the highest sense. This blessing God hath not promised to all the natural offspring of Abraham; but that he would give them the land of Canaan, the divine oracles and institutions, and own them as sustaining a covenant relation to him, so long as they walked in his ways, and observed his commandments to do them.

That God's promise doth take effect St. Paul proves, not only by saying, *They are not all Israel that are of Israel*; but asserts, *In Isaac shall thy seed be called*.

He farther illustrates the matter by introducing the affair of Rebecca, who had conceived by Isaac. *For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*

Thus the apostle reconciles the difficulty that ariseth from a consideration of the rejection of the unbelieving Jews, and the word of promise.

I. By explaining the true meaning of the promise; viz: That it was not made, in the highest spiritual sense, to all the natural seed; but only to those who should be the seed of Abraham by faith.

II. By asserting and proving the absolute sovereignty of God, in disposing of the children of men; and at the same time, answers a cavil against the doctrine expressed in the 14th verse and on: *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.*

This he illustrates also by the instance of Pharaoh. *For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.* God had determined to withhold his grace from Pharaoh, and to allow, or permit him to take the course to which his proud, stubborn heart prompted him.

All the children of men are plunged alike into a state of sin and misery, equally under guilt by the apostacy, and exposed to wrath. God in a sovereign way picks out some of the fallen, apostatized race, and makes them

vessels of grace and glory. The apostle's argument is, there is no unrighteousness in God's proceeding thus. Then in the 19th. verse he introduceth another objector. *Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? Who hath resisted his will?* To which he answers, *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto 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 to dishonor?* Thus the apostle asserts God's right, as the sovereign owner and ruler of the world, to bestow special favors on some, which he withholds from others of the same description.

In discoursing from these words, I propose to show,

I. That all mankind, Jews and Gentiles, are in a state of sin and guilt, exposed to wrath; and so are justly as absolutely at the disposal of God, both with respect to his giving them *external means*, and bestowing on them *special grace*, as the clay is at the disposal of the potter.

II. Shall briefly consider the principal means which God, here represented by the potter, useth, in forming some to be vessels unto honor.

III. Conclude with some improvement.

I. That all mankind, Jews and Gentiles, are in a state of sin and guilt, exposed to wrath, and so are justly as absolutely at the disposal of God, both with respect to his giving them external means; and bestowing on them *special* grace, as the clay is at the disposal of the potter, will appear from the following considerations.

1. That God made Adam in his own image, a free voluntary agent, capable of standing, but liable to fall; and that he was placed as the public head or representative of his posterity: That God gave him a law, as a rule of his obedience, annexing death *to him, and his posterity*, as the penalty. That we take great care, and have our ideas of *this* matter regulated by the holy scriptures, and so be prepared to consent to the truth of it; and acknowledge humbly, that in Adam we sinned and died, is of great importance. That we be able also to see and acknowledge that Adam was to blame for his sin, and that there is justice and propriety in imputing it to us. That it is a just and glorious thing in God to determine, that the posterity of Adam should, because of their connection with him, come into the world devoid of the holy moral image of God; and, instead thereof, have such an indwelling, permanent, powerful propensity to sin, as will certainly lead them to eternal ruin, unless it be counteracted by means and divine grace.

These are indeed some of the leading truths

of divine revelation. And we acknowledge there are some difficulties involved in the assertion, that God hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, and yet that Adam was in such a sense a free agent as constituted him a proper subject of praise and blame. Adam, having received his existence from another, communicates the idea of his being very inferior to his Creator, who is absolutely perfect and unchangeable. God saw proper, in his infinite wisdom, to place in the scale of being such a creature as man, endowed, as he was, with certain degrees of what may be called natural and moral excellency or ability. An independent, self-sufficient, almighty creature cannot exist. Great degrees of dependency on God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, are inseparable from creatures, both with respect to the existence and exercise of every kind of power.

Some have asserted, that there is in the human will a self-determining power, or that the human will is *free*, and that this was necessary to constitute man a moral agent, or render him a proper subject of blame or praise. Others deny this, in the sense in which it is asserted, and affirm it improper to say at all, the human *will* is free; but that *man* is free to do what he wills; or is a voluntary free agent, at liberty to act or not act, according to the dictates of his will. It is also asserted, that human volitions are to be ranked among *effects*, which are produced by causes foreign to them, and so conclude, that

the will is determined by some extrinsic cause, that is, by something without, or distinct from, itself. Thus, in the chain of causes that produce effects, they run up to the first cause of all things, which is God; and exculpate the ever-blessed and holy God from blame, in introducing, by a necessary connection of causes and events, the first sinful human volition, by saying, that the sinfulness of it, and of every one else, lies, not in its cause, but in its nature. Therefore, though the volitions and actions of a moral agent are necessary, with that kind of necessity which exists between moral causes and effects, yet they may be blameable and praise-worthy.

This affair may also be represented by saying, that God placed Adam as the public head and representative of his posterity, with such abilities as it pleased God to give him, constantly however dependent upon his Maker, in every possible view; and that it pleased God, in his infinite wisdom, to withhold from him that divine influence which was necessary to his continuance in his holy state, and that immediately being left, he fell.

Others say, that God made man in his own image, capable to stand and liable to fall; that God permitted his fall, and overruled it in a wise and powerful manner, so that he has brought great good out of great evil.

The Christian world are very sensible that the introduction of sin is a matter of great mystery, and that clouds and darkness hang over it. I shall at present say nothing more concerning it:--Nor shall I attempt to illustrate the wisdom, justice and goodness of the divine constitution, which placed Adam as the foederal head of his posterity. Let it suffice to say *it was done* by the infinitely wise, holy, just and merciful God, the glorious head of the universe. *And shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* Let it suffice also to say, that Adam thus placed did sin; was truly and really to blame for his sin; and that his posterity sinned and died in him. So that it is a fact, an awful and lamentable truth, that we have been *shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin*;--are disposed, as soon as capable of moral exertions, to do evil, and averse from that which is holy and good.

The old testament, no doubt, teacheth, that Adam's posterity were included with him in the covenant God entered into with him, and the denunciation of the threatning, as appears from the curse upon the ground, which was to be inhabited by his posterity, and by the effects which soon took place in consequence of the fall. But the new testament, which explains much of the old, throws great light on this matter, and asserts, *that by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*

But to make the matter still more clear, and leave no room to suppose that none suffered the penalty of death, but those who were guilty of actual sin against a known law, the apostle adds, *For until the law, that is, before the giving the written law by Moses, sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed where there is no law:* And farther adds, *That death, which was the penalty, reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression.* That is, death, the wages of sin, was suffered by infants, who had not, as Adam had, actually broken a known law. This one man, by whom sin entered, was Adam. For Paul says, I. Cor. 15. 22. *In Adam all die.*

II. It will appear that all mankind, Jews and Gentiles, are in a state of sin and guilt, and so are justly exposed to wrath, from a consideration of the universal wickedness of mankind, which I shall not now take time to describe.

III. From the holy oracles of God.--Of the old world it was said, *that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually.* In another place, *The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* Very remarkable is that passage in Job. *What is man, that he should be clean? And he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints: yea, the heavens are not clean in*

*his fight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water? The Psalmist says, Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Jeremiah declares, The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? Our Lord says, Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murder &c. as out of their native fountain. The same truth is taught by our Saviour, when he affirms, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And when the author of our text is proving that justification cannot be obtained by the deeds of the law, but by faith in Christ, he shows, that both Jews and Gentiles were under sin, though the latter had not the written law; That all had done wickedly; --there is none righteous, no not one; yea, there is none that doeth good, no not one.*

Thus it appears, that all mankind, Jews and Gentiles, are in a state of sin and guilt. We have sinned in our representative, and all, who have obtained a capacity for personal, actual sin, have broken God's law. Now if the law is good, the penalty proper, and if all have broken it, then all are justly obnoxious to punishment, and nothing, but an act of grace, can prevent the execution of the sentence. The law declares the sinner shall die.

True, and a glorious truth it is, that Christ our Mediator has perfectly kept the divine law; died the death of the cross; has arisen

from the dead ; has ascended into heaven ; and is there clothed with authority, with full power, as the great executor of the divine purposes, to give eternal life to men.--But to whom ? To all men ? No. Christ teacheth us what to believe concerning this. Just before his suffering, he lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, *Father, the hour is come ; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.* Agreeably to this we are told in the Acts, That when Paul and Barnabas were rejected by the Jews, they turned to the Gentiles, and informed them, *That Christ was set to be a light of the Gentiles; that he should be for salvation to the ends of the earth: And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: And as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.* Believers in Christ are frequently spoken of as those who were under the law, were dead in sin, and under the curse ; but they are washed with the washing of regeneration, they are renewed by the holy Ghost. Repentance is given to them, faith is given, according to the divine, eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ before the world began.

We do not know, nor can we know, who these vessels unto honor are, until they are called and sanctified, bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and so by an holy life and conversation cause their light to shine in the world.

This *effectual calling*, this *washing of regeneration*, and *renewing of the holy Ghost*, is not of him that *willeth*, nor of him that *runneth*; but of God that *sheweth mercy*. Agreeably to this, *John*, speaking of them who had power to become the sons of God, adds, *Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Seeing then that all have sinned in Adam, that all, who have been capable of actual sin, have transgressed, and so are justly dead in law; and God is not bound by any promise to show mercy to all, and *none* deserve it; seeing also that God gives his written law and other means only to some nations; and by his Son gives spiritual and eternal life only to a *part* where his gospel is: Therefore we may conclude, that men are as absolutely at the disposal of the great Jehovah, both with respect to granting the *external* means, and the bestowment of *special*, sanctifying grace, as the clay is at the disposal of the potter, who can, and does, with great propriety, take parts of the same large lump, and make *vessels* to different uses.

We now proceed to the *second* head, which is briefly to mention some of the *principal means*, which God, here represented by the potter, useth in forming some to be *vessels unto honor*.

Jesus Christ hath been from eternity designed of God a Mediator between God and man. By him God made the world. By him sinners

of Adam's race are enlightened, redeemed, sanctified, and saved from wrath. Christ has graciously interfered in the characters of prophet, priest and king. As a PROPHEt, he has given men much instruction. In ancient times, before his incarnation, he appeared as the angel of the covenant, and gave salutary and necessary instructions. By the influence of the holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Christ, we have the holy scripture, that infallibly written guide, which giveth true information respecting our apostacy, and the method of recovery. In due time Christ assumed the body God prepared; came into the world, a light to lighten the nations; and invited those that labored, and were heavy laden, to come unto him that they might find *rest* to their souls. As a PRIEST, he, once for all, made a sufficient, a full and satisfactory sacrifice of himself to God for the sins of those whom God had given him, and is ascended into heaven, there to make continual intercession for those who are disposed and enabled to come unto God by him. As a KING, he is, according to antient promise, exalted upon God's holy hill of Zion;--thrones, dominions and principalities are made subject to him. All power in heaven and on earth is given into his hand, that he may give eternal life to as many as the Father has given him. We are also told that he has the keys of hell and of death. So that he is ruling in heaven, earth and hell; in the hearts of his people, and over all

his and their enemies. As the great head of his church, Christ hath instituted ordinances to be observed by it; baptism as the door of admission; the Lord's supper for commemoration, instruction, growth in knowledge and grace; which ordinances are God's covenants of promise; \* in which he promiseth still to be a God to his people, and calls upon them to accept of offered mercy.

Father, before Christ's ascension, he, assuring his apostles of his authority for the purpose, said, *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.* They went according to those directions; they taught, baptized, planted churches, watered them, governed them, and ordained others also to teach, to preach, to administer ordinances and govern, in conjunction with such other rulers as the new testament calls *governments*, or *governors*, who did not labor in the word and doctrine.

Here it is worthy of observation, the apostles carefully give the character of a gospel-bishop, and direct those they had ordained to lay hands suddenly on no man. Even *the deacons*

\* Vide Doctor Guise on Eph: ii. 12, with his note. With him I agree in calling the ordinances of the gospel God's covenants of promise.

*must first be proved.* Thus we are taught, that those to whom the power of ordination is committed, must carefully examine as to the prerequisite qualifications for teaching, preaching and governing in the church of God.

I shall here also mention the divine providences, which are admirably calculated to reprove and instruct men. these By often are the ways of sinners hedged in, as with thorns, and they are not allowed to proceed in that prosperity with which the human heart is most pleased; and by them frequently are the people of God much benefited. *Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now I have learned to keep thy law.*

I shall conclude this head by observing, that the cooperations of the Spirit are essentially necessary, and therefore Christ promised, John 16 : 8 &c. that after his ascension he would send the Spirit, *to reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement; and he shall guide you into all truth, and he shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.* These are some of the principal means which God, here represented by a potter, useth in forming vessels unto honor.

I now proceed to an improvement of the subject.

Here I am naturally led, *first*, to address you, my dear and Revd brethren,\* in the gospel of

\*This sermon was first preached before a number of ministers

our Lord Jesus. What has been said offers to our minds the great importance of the office and work in which we are engaged. We are taught to consider mankind in a state of sin and guilt, exposed to the wrath of an almighty and holy God; that Christ is, by a variety of means, and by our instrumentality, forming vessels to honor out of the great corrupt mass. This is an alarming thought, viz: That all those who are not by the word, providences, gospel and Spirit of Christ, formed unto honor, are vessels unto dishonor. Nothing more is necessary to form men to an extreme of wickedness, than for God to withhold from them his grace. Thus, I suppose, God hardened Pharaoh's heart; thus God sends strong delusions to some, that they may believe a lie, and be damned. If we are to judge that none are coming to honor, but such as are, by the forming influence of means and divine efficacious grace, conformed unto the divine image, then how few vessels unto honor in our day? Secret things belong unto the Lord; his revealed will is the rule by which we are to deport ourselves in the gospel ministry. It is possible we may be glorious in the eyes of our Lord, though very unsuccessful. We know not whom, among those who have not given evidence of sanctification, he hath chosen or ordained to eternal life; but our business is, *knowing the terror of the Lord, to persuade men to be reconciled to God; to reprove, rebuke and exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.* As good stewards of the mysteries of God, we are

to endeavor rightly to divide the word of truth. We are to hold up to the view of our fellow men the strictness, the spirituality and unchangeableness of God's law, carefully to describe the depravity of the human heart, and the danger of the ways of sin. We are to search out all the lurking places of disguised hypocrites, and inform them, that nothing short of holiness of heart, true repentance, an humble dependence upon, and choice of Christ, the Lord our righteousness, will answer. No doubt it will be highly proper to dwell much upon the excellency, glory and all-sufficiency of Christ, and of the great atonement he has made. We will also do well frequently to recollect what Christ said to the primitive ministers of his religion, *Without me ye can do nothing. Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase.* Our time to act as instruments for Christ in this world is short, we are dying daily; therefore, to do whatsoever our hands find to do with our might, will surely be proper.

Secondly, Let all such as have scriptural reason to believe that divine grace hath been already, in some degree, communicated, be thankful; because you entertain hope that God is forming you into the divine likeness, and preparing you for eternal honor. Let such review the corrupt lump from which they were taken. What maketh any of you to differ from others *more* wicked in

practice? Is it not that you have had means, and the transforming, sanctifying grace of God? *By the grace of God, I am what I am*, said the apostle

3. I shall say a few words to those who are yet in their sins, unregenerate, and possibly more unlikely, by appearance, to be formed unto honor than formerly. You have heard in this discourse, that God made man in his own holy image, that Adam was placed as a public head, that in him we sinned and died; that all have sinned, and consequently that all be at the mercy, at the disposal of God. The blessed God shows by his conduct that he considers this the case. He has taken church privileges from the Jews, and given them to the Gentiles; he gives his grace to some, and withholds it from others. His reasons for this conduct are above us. It will most certainly be dangerous to rest satisfied in the belief of such principles, and continue disposed to make such objections to the doctrines held to view in this discourse, as are prevalent in the world.

The objection, *Why doth he yet find fault?* is still in the hearts and mouths of men. Why should he not find fault? Did not God make man upright? Has he not sought out many inventions? Was not Adam to blame for his sin? Were you not represented in Adam? Is not sin imputed to you? And have you not sinned in your own proper persons? And are

you not to blame? Most certainly. If you are, you ought to confess guilty, and throw yourselves upon the *mercy* of God.

But It may be queried, If God has given to Christ a certain number *only*, and the others are not chosen to life, and God does not intend to communicate his grace to them; then how are they to blame, and how can the sincerity of God be vindicated in making offers to the multitude? Here it must be remembered, that God is infinitely wise; that his ways and thoughts are far above ours; *that he calleth those things which be not, as though they were.* That instructions, invitations, remonstrances &c. &c. are designed as means, by the all-wise God, for forming his chosen ones to glory. The wicked are to blame for not loving God supremely; for their not loving his holy law; for their loving and chusing sin. Their rejection of Christ is to be considered, not as their first sin; but as the highest manifestation of the depravity and stubbornness, yea, the rebellion of the heart.

Let it be considered, that all the inability sinners are under is a *want of disposition*, not a natural inability, or a want of power to do that which they have a heart or disposition to perform. Men are able to love what pleaseth them, what is agreeable to them. Are we not to blame for our opposition to the great God and his laws? Are we not to blame, in

that we do not love and approve of that, which every just, holy and excellent being in the universe approves of? And in that we approve of what is abhorred by every wise, holy, just and excellent being?

With regard to the sincerity of God in making overtures to the multitude, let what has been said in the preceding part of the discourse be recollected; viz. That God made man upright, and he has, through his own default, lost a holy disposition; that all men are justly condemned by the law; and that the offers of mercy are free, undeserved grace. Let it be remembered also, that God hath thought proper to give those, whom he hath ordained to eternal life, their existence in different ages, in different countries and places; and, as the great and wise disposer of all things, he has fixed upon certain means, which he designs to render effectual for the eternal salvation of his chosen ones. It is to be observed too, that the prophets of old called upon a whole nation to which they were sent. Christ preached to promiscuous multitudes: The apostles were directed to teach all nations, and hold up the terms of salvation: Christ's ministers now are to imitate them. Where is the insincerity of this? Is there any injury offered to men, when they have proposals of mercy and pardon made to them, who stand in so much need of both? especially when the reason of non-acceptance is their own blameable opposition to

God, his law and holiness, and their approbation or choice of sin. And let it be remembered too, and we must insist upon it, that there are no promises of regenerating grace and eternal salvation made to the doings of unregenerate men. The promises of salvation are only made to believers, so that God is not chargeable with any breach of promise made to them. Christ expressly says, *Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able*; that is, in the way in which they seek.

Indeed, there are promises that God will pour out of his Spirit abundantly, and that he will wash with clean water, and give the new heart; *Yet for all this I will be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.* But who are the house of Israel, that shall thus wrestle with God in prayer and prevail? Not the un sanctified, the unbelieving and unholy, I suppose; but the true spiritual Israel of God; yea, all who are the children of Abraham, by being made partakers of his faith. These God stirreth up to search after him with all their hearts, when in mercy he intendeth to pour out of his promised Spirit, to convince and to sanctify; while others are indulging their natural propensities, and perhaps very thoughtless of God and of eternal things.

We will suppose now, a sinner finally and irretrievably lost, and enduring the wrath of God, and taking a retrospective view of his

past situation and circumstances, and of his present state. I conceive his remarks would be as follows: "I was once on earth for a short space; I was taught my days there would be few; I was directed to attend to my spiritual and eternal interest; I was informed that Adam represented me and all his posterity; that he broke the law under which he was placed; that his sin was imputed to me, so that I was guilty; that when I became capable of moral action, I was disposed to evil. I did live in the love and practice of sin against God, contrary to the dictates of my conscience. Christ did come into the world, did keep the law of God perfectly, died in the room of sinners of Adam's race; he arose, and had power to give repentance, pardon of sin, and eternal life. All this and much more of his ability and willingness to save I heard, and was very inattentive and unconcerned. My heart fought after the then present enjoyments: I did not love the terms on which salvation was offered: I could not brook that God should be a sovereign, and, in the situation I was, save or damn me as it pleased HIM. I never did feel a disposition from my heart to come down so low as to acknowledge that I really and justly merited hell; and therefore, in all my endeavors to seek favor, I secretly thought that God would be improperly severe, if I perished finally. I was told that secret things belonged to the Lord; and that his revealed will it was my duty to obey. I did not know but I might have obtain-

ed mercy; but I did not like the terms, nor did I, agreeably to them, earnestly and perseveringly seek". Rage, despair, and every improper temper, I suppose, would in such a mind prevail.

But to return; I think there are fully sufficient reasons why sinners of Adam's race should be eternally punished, even if Christ had never been promised. Surely then, though Christ hath thought proper to publish the terms of salvation to the promiscuous multitude, those to whom proposals or offers of pardon and mercy are made, are not injured or affronted, seeing they really are guilty, and need pardon: Especially if we add to all this, that God deals with men as reasonable creatures, and gives much information, many rebukes, counsels, warnings and remonstrances, and that, in the present state of things, the wicked are much benefited by Christ's kingdom, and the instructions, ordinances and government of it.

As to the representation frequently made of a prince binding a number of men with strong chains, in a prison, and then calling upon them to come out, offering rewards, &c. it is *unfair and unjust*. For all the chains, - with which sinners are bound, are of their own making and putting on, and consist only in the disposition or choice of their own hearts. We are to blame primarily and principally for our love of sin, and aversion from God and his law. The

more we have of this, the more we are to blame. Therefore sinners are so often exhorted to turn from sin, and turn to God.

Another objection frequently made to this scheme of doctrine, is, *That Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.* I. John ii. 2. To which I answer, the apostles of Christ were Jews. The Jews had been directed to keep themselves separate from the Gentiles. To the Jews the promise of the Messiah had been in a particular manner directed, and they had no idea that the other nations were to be benefited by Christ, as abundantly appears in holy writ. When the apostles obtained conviction that the blessings of the gospel were communicated to other nations equally with themselves, they break out in astonishment, *Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life!* And *He is not only a propitiation for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world.* I. John, ii. 2. Every body knows that the universal terms *all the world, all men, &c.* can, in sundry places, only mean great numbers, and so are used in a restrictive sense.

What should we do then, the sinner will say? I answer: Use every possible mean to obtain just ideas of God, of his law, of yourselves, your sin, your guilt; of Christ and his righteousness, of heaven and of hell. Attend carefully; *By the law is the knowledge of sin. Faith cometh by hearing.* Listen then to the gospel. We have no idea that God ever regenerates a person, while utterly ignorant of all

cised, where there is no knowledge. Therefore the careful use of means is necessary, and is calculated to remove a barr out of the way of your salvation.

Attending then to these truths that respect your eternal salvation, come, bow before a holy and merciful God; confess the truth; lie in the dust, and cry with the anxiety which the nature of the case requires; Lord, for Christ's sake, be merciful to me a sinner justly condemned.

God, in the exercise of grace in a sovereign way, is giving the means to some, which he withholds from others, and conferring efficacious grace upon some, which he withholds from others of the same description. By means, and by grace conferred, vessels are formed unto honor. Let your prayer be, Lord, without thy grace I shall be a vessel unto dishonor.

Finally, let all remember, that as *none by searching can find out the Almighty unto perfection*, so we are very incompetent to know and judge of all the reasons of the divine conduct in many cases. To solve clearly all the difficulties that may be stated concerning the foreordinations of heaven, and the liberty of moral agents, is no easy task. Clearly to see into the reasons why God hath left some nations in great ignorance, while others enjoy great light and means, and why some are formed

vessels unto honor, and others left to be vessels unto dishonor, is not for us weak, short-sighted, imperfect mortals. Christ hath taught us modesty here. *I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.* And the apostle says, *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?*

THE END OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.