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NINE SERMONS

ON THE

DECREES AND AGENCY
OF GOD.

BY WILLIAM R. WEEKS, D. D.

THIRD EDITION.

NEWARK, N. J.

PUBLISHED BY THE ECCLESIASTICAL BOARD OF
TRUSTEES FOR THE PROPAGATION
OF THE GOSPEL.

John R. Weeks, Printer.

1839.

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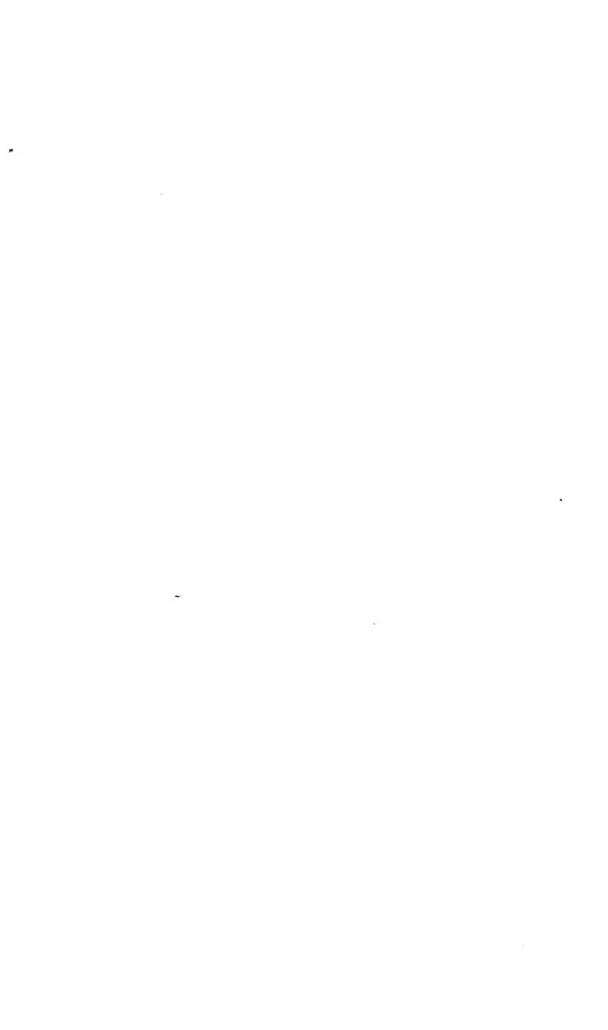
P R E F A C E

TO THE THIRD EDITION.

THE design of this little volume is to present a compendious view of one of the great doctrines of the Gospel. It is intended to furnish a plain statement of the doctrine, a brief view of its proofs, and a short answer to the principal objections which are made against it. In doing this, the author has aimed to present in a small compass the substance of what is not elsewhere to be found, except in large volumes. But, as in laboring to be brief, he may sometimes have been obscure, he would entreat the reader, not for his sake, but for the truth's sake, and for his own sake, not to reject any part, unless by a repeated and careful perusal, he shall be well assured he is not rejecting that truth of God by which he must himself be judged in the great day.

The first edition of these discourses was published at Plattsburgh in 1813, the second at Providence in 1819. The present edition has been prepared at the request of the Ecclesiastical Board of Trustees for the Propagation of the Gospel, and contains but few alterations from the preceding. If it shall aid in defending a doctrine now much despised and neglected, the author will feel himself amply rewarded for his labor.

Newark, N. J., May, 1839.



SERMON I.

EPHESIANS I. 11.

Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

WHEN we take a survey of the world around us, it appears a scene of confusion. Wickedness is triumphant, while virtue is trodden in the dust. Here, we see the good man, oppressed with want, struggling with poverty, or groaning in a dungeon; there, we see his oppressor, rolling in splendor, glittering with wealth, and possessing more than heart could wish. In one place, we see fraud, and violence, and robbery prevail; and in another, intemperance, and lewdness, and crimes that ought not to be named. Atheism and infidelity raise their heads, and stalk abroad, while humble piety is compelled to shun the light, and take refuge among the poor, the ignorant, and the despised. Scoffers walk on every side, blasphemers are bold and daring, and the enemies of the cross already begin the shouts of victory. But "why do the heathen rage, and the people

imagine a vain thing? He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." In the midst of all this confusion, the Lord reigns. His hand, unseen, directs and moves the numerous springs of all this vast and complicated machinery. The trembling saint may lean with unshaken confidence upon the God of heaven; for it is He "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." In discoursing from these words, it is proposed

I. To show that God has decreed, or fore-ordained, whatsoever comes to pass.

II. That he executes his decrees by his own agency.

III. Attend to some objections which are made against this doctrine.

And then conclude with an improvement of the whole.

First, then, it is to be proved that God has decreed, or fore-ordained, whatsoever comes to pass. And,

1. That God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass, is evident from his possessing infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. None will deny that he has these perfections. He would no longer be God, if he had not. If, then, he is a being of infinite wisdom, he must know what is best, under all possible circumstances. If he is a being of infinite goodness, he must choose that what is best, under all circumstances, should take

place. If he is a being of infinite power, nothing can prevent the accomplishment of what he chooses. We may conclude, therefore, that whatever does take place is for the best, and that God has, from eternity, invariably chosen that it should take place, just as it does.

To state this a little more at large:—The infinite wisdom and intelligence of God enable him to perceive what events will best promote the greatest good of the universe, or secure the highest sum of holiness and happiness among intelligent beings. And in this he cannot possibly be mistaken. Before he began to create, when all possible systems were before his mind, he could not but perceive which system would include and bring to pass the greatest sum of good. He saw things in all their connections and consequences. The smallest event could not escape his observation. The least conceivable occurrence was as clearly seen by him as the greatest. And if any event would mar the system, or occasion the least defect in it, he knew it perfectly well. If the present system of events, taken as a whole, therefore, is not the best system, and does not include in it and bring to pass more good than any other possible system, and if all its parts are not the best calculated to promote the great end of the whole, and arranged in the best possible manner, it cannot be for the want of knowledge in God. He knew it as well before he began to operate, as he does now.

God is also infinite in goodness. When he contemplated the different possible systems of events, and saw which was the best, which would include and promote the highest good of the universe, he could not but give that system the preference. He could not possibly reject the best, and choose the worst. He could not prefer a less good to a greater good. To say God is infinite in goodness, and yet prefers a less good to a greater good, is a contradiction. God certainly chooses that the best system should be carried into effect. He certainly chooses that the greatest sum of good should be secured. He certainly chooses that those events should take place which are best adapted to effect this. He certainly chooses that no event should take place by which the greatest good of the universe would suffer. If, therefore, the present system is not the best, it is not that which God prefers. If any event which takes place is not, on the whole, for the best, it takes place contrary to God's wish,—it takes place although he chooses it should not take place,—it comes into existence in defiance of all that God can do to prevent it.

But this cannot be true, for God is also infinite in power. He is the Almighty. None can stay his hand or resist his will. If he sees that an event is, on the whole, for the best, and chooses it should take place, he is able to bring it to pass. If he sees that an event is not for the best, and

chooses it should not take place, he is able to prevent its taking place.

If, therefore, any supposable event is not for the best, God's infinite wisdom enables him to perceive that it is not, his infinite goodness prompts him to prevent it, and his infinite power enables him to prevent it. And thus, we may conclude, with certainty, that no such event ever comes into existence. No event, therefore, ever takes place, but what is, on the whole, for the best. But those events which are for the best, God chooses should take place. Therefore, whatever takes place, God chooses should take place, just as it does. That is, God chooses, and always has chosen, that the events which come to pass, should come to pass just as they do. But, by *choice* and *decree*, we mean the same thing. Therefore, God has, from eternity, decreed whatsoever comes to pass.

To escape the force of this argument, it has been said that it proves contrary to truth. It has been said with confidence that sin is not for the best, and that the system would have been much better if sin and misery had been forever unknown. But this is a bold assertion. It strikes directly at the divine perfections. It manifests an arrogance and presumption, which very ill become creatures of yesterday who know nothing. To say this, is to tell God he might have done better than he has done. It is undertaking to

arraign the wisdom of God's plan, when we have seen but a small part of it. It argues more modesty in worms of the dust, to admit that God does wisely and well, even though we may not be able to see fully the propriety of what he does. But, if the introduction of sin was not, on the whole, for the best, why did not God prevent it? Did he not know whether it would be for the best or not? Did he not know whether the greatest good of the universe would suffer by its introduction? To say that God does not know what is for the best, is to impeach the divine wisdom. Why, then, did he not prevent it? Had he no choice about it? Did he look on with indifference? Is he so regardless of the greatest good of the universe as not to care whether it is promoted or sacrificed? To say this, is very highly to impeach his goodness. Did he choose to prevent it, then, but find himself unable? To say this, is to impeach his power. To say this, is to say that God is not almighty. Some, indeed, do say, that the sin which exists is not for the best, and that God knew it, and chose to prevent its entrance into the world; but that he could not prevent it, without destroying the freedom of man as a moral agent; and that this is the reason he did not prevent it. But when they say this, they say that which cannot be supported; and they also give up the very point for which they contend, and admit the argument in all its force.

First, they say that which cannot be supported. It can be shown that God could prevent man from sinning without infringing upon his moral agency. For, not to insist upon that which is true, but is denied by these men, to wit, that God can incline the will and give man a heart to obey, without infringing upon his moral agency, God could have prevented man from sinning in many other ways. He could have prevented man from sinning, by keeping out of his way every temptation. He could have confined the tempter to the prison of hell. He could have taken away the life of man, before the temptation was presented, and taken him to heaven while he was yet upright and spotless. He could have reduced all things again to their primitive nothing, before sin had ruined his work. It is manifest, then, that God could have prevented man from sinning, without touching his moral agency. But, again, when any say that God did not prevent man from sinning because he would thereby have destroyed his moral agency, they give up the point, and admit the argument in all its force. For, to say that the reason why God did not prevent man from sinning was, that by so doing he would have destroyed his moral agency, is the same as to say, that God chose man should sin, rather than take this means to prevent it; that is, that it was better, in God's view, that man should sin, than that his moral agency should be destroyed; in other

words, that it was, upon the whole, all things being considered, for the best that man should sin. It is evident, therefore, that nothing comes to pass but what is, on the whole, for the best; and that God can, and does, choose or decree, that things should take place just as they do.

2. That God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass, is evident from the divine fore-knowledge. That God from eternity infallibly foreknew every thing which comes to pass in time, none will deny who believe there is a God of infinite perfection. All things that are to us past, present, and to come, are forever present to the view of Him "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." By the fore-knowledge of God, and the decrees of God, are not meant the same thing. They are perfectly distinct from each other. The fore-knowledge of God is as distinct from his decrees, as our knowledge is from our determinations. But the divine fore-knowledge implies the divine decrees, as its foundation. When it is said God *infallibly* foreknows, it is meant that he foreknows without the possibility of being mistaken. We may form *conjectures* respecting future events; but our conjectures may prove true, or they may prove false. God does not merely conjecture that a thing will take place, he *knows* it will. But if he knows it will, it certainly will. He cannot know a thing will be, which will not be. This is a contradiction. It

is not meant that the divine fore-knowledge has any influence in bringing the event to pass. *Fore-knowledge* of an event can have no more influence upon it than *after* knowledge. God's knowledge of it can have no more influence upon it than our knowledge. All that is meant is, that if God foreknows an event, it is certain, infallibly certain, that that event will take place; and all the powers in the universe cannot render it uncertain, unless they can render it possible for God to know a thing and not know it, at the same time. A writer of some note,* does indeed say, that "a thing may either be or not be, notwithstanding that foresight of it which we ascribe to God." But this is impossible, unless the foresight of God is mere uncertain conjecture, like our own; and that is no *fore-knowledge* at all. When we speak of uncertainties, contingencies, being or not being, we always have reference to ourselves. Things are uncertain to us, but not to God. When it is said, therefore, that God foreknows a particular event, it is meant that that event is certain to him. And it would be equally certain to us, if we could foreknow, or if God should communicate his knowledge of it to us. The event is certain in itself, or it could not be the object of the divine knowledge. It has a real existence in the divine mind. But it is a matter of uncertainty to us whether it will happen or not, because we are not

* Mr. Fletcher.

informed how it will be. The event is certain in itself, and is not made any more nor any less so, by any one's knowledge or want of knowledge. But if a future event is certain in itself, as it must be in order that God should foreknow it, there must be some cause which made it so. There must be some reason why it will take place rather than not. And since God knew all things from eternity, they were all certain from eternity; and they must have an eternal cause which made them certain, since nothing can operate and produce effects, before it exists. What was this cause? Was it chance, or fate, or the will of God, or some other being? It must be one of these, for there is no other supposition possible. Was it chance? No: there is no such thing as chance; and if there were, chance renders nothing certain, but uncertain. Was it any creature? No: the creatures are not eternal, and they could not exert an agency to make any thing certain, before they themselves existed. Was it any other being? No: there is no eternal being but God. To deny, therefore, that it was the will of God, which made every thing certain from eternity, is to maintain the doctrine of *fate*. To say that all things are certain from eternity, and yet that they are not made so by the will of God, is to say that there is a blind, undesigning, irresistible fatality in things, which is beyond the power of God himself to control, and which ren-

ders them certain and unavoidable, without any means being necessary to the end, or any causes necessary to produce effects. This appears to be the Mahometan idea of fate; and with all its absurdities and contradictions, it is the doctrine virtually maintained by all who admit the divine fore-knowledge, and yet deny the divine decrees. But there is no such thing as fate: and since all things are certain from eternity, God, by the most free, wise, and holy counsel of his own will, has made it certain that all things should take place just as they do; that is, God, from eternity, must have decreed whatsoever comes to pass.

It may be observed, further, that it is impossible for God to know what he will do himself, unless he has determined what to do. If a man asks me what I shall do to-morrow, it will be impossible for me to tell him what I shall do, unless I have determined what to do. It is impossible for God to know what his creatures will do, unless he has determined what they shall do. For, even on the supposition that they can do some things without his immediate causation, yet, if their doing or not doing certain things depends upon his permitting or not permitting them, his hindering or not hindering them, and he has not yet determined whether he will hinder them or not, it is impossible for him to know whether he will hinder them or not, and consequently it is impossible for him to know whether they will do those

things or not. If, therefore, God foreknew from eternity that every event would take place just as it does, it was because he had determined from eternity that every event should take place just as it does, because he had determined to cause those things which he causes, and to permit those things which he permits. And these embrace all events. To say that God only determined to make man, and then to leave him to the freedom of his own will, and yet knew how he would act, if thus left, is the same as to say that he chose, on the whole, that he should act in that manner; that is, that he decreed all his actions.

3. That God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass, is evident from scripture. The scriptures represent God as having decreed whatever takes place in the natural world. Prov. 8. 29. "He gave to the sea his *decree*, that the waters should not pass his commandment: he *appointed* the foundations of the earth." Job 28. 26. "He made a *decree* for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder." Ps. 148. 8. "Fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind fulfilling his *word*." But with respect to events in the natural world, it will probably be granted by all, that God has decreed them. The great question is, whether he has decreed the voluntary actions of men, and especially their wicked actions, and their eternal state. Let us see, then, what the scriptures say upon these points. Acts 17. 26.

He "hath *determined* the times *before appointed*, and the bounds of their habitation." He has determined where men should dwell, though this depends upon their wills. Therefore, he must have determined what they should will. Job 14. 5. "His days are *determined*, the number of his months are with thee: thou hast *appointed* his bounds that he cannot pass." He has determined the day of man's death; yet this often depends upon his own voluntary care or neglect of himself, and very often upon the will of a murderer. He has determined the day of judgment. Acts 17. 31. "He hath *appointed* a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained." He has determined the rise and fall of kingdoms, though this depends upon the voluntary conduct of men. Dan. 4. 17. "This matter is by the *decree* of the Watchers, and the demand by the *word* of the Holy Ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High *ruleth* in the kingdom of men, and *giveth* it to whomsoever he *will*." Rev. 17. 17. "For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his *will*, and to agree and give their kingdom unto the beast." It was his will (of decree) that the beast should have the kingdom. Isaiah 14. 24. "The Lord of Hosts hath sworn, saying, surely as I have *thought*, so shall it come to pass; and as I have *purposed*, so shall it stand; that I will break the Assyrian in my land." Is. 19.

12, 13, 14. "Where are thy wise men? and let them tell thee now, and let them know what the Lord of Hosts hath *purposed* upon Egypt. The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived. The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof; and they have caused Egypt to err." Is. 23. 8, 9. "Who hath taken his *counsel* against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes? The Lord of Hosts hath *purposed* it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth." Zeph. 3. 8. "My *determination* is, to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger." The rise and fall of kingdoms depend upon the wills of men: but they are decreed. He determined the time of Christ's death, though this depended upon the will of his murderers. Dan. 9. 24. "Seventy weeks are *determined* upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy."

It may be said, however, that these are general things, and great events; that if God has determined these, that does not prove that he has determined particular events and little things, which are unworthy of his notice. But, it may be asked,

are not general things made up of particulars, and great events of small ones? If a general thing has been determined, all the particulars of which it is made up, must have been determined also. If a great event has been decreed, all the little events upon which that great event depends, must have been decreed also. If one link in the chain should fail, the whole chain would fail as certainly as if every link was broken. The least particle of dust that floats upon the wind may be destined to enter the lungs of an emperor, and by his death to change the political face of the world. It is evident, then, that God has his purposes respecting every creature that he has made, and all their motions and actions, from the tallest seraph before his throne, to the mote that plays in the sunbeams, or the particle of dust that is driven by the winds.

SERMON II.

EPIHESIANS I. 11.

Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

WE proceed with the evidence from scripture that God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass.

It is sometimes said that whatever else the scriptures may represent God as having decreed, they do not say that he has decreed sin. The wicked actions of men certainly were not fore-ordained. To this, it may be answered, that some of the events mentioned in the passages already quoted were the wicked actions of men. For the kings of the earth "to agree and give their kingdom unto the beast," was a great sin; but God had decreed it, and "put in their hearts" to do so. Assyria, and Egypt, and Tyre were destroyed by the wicked actions of wicked men, fulfilling the decrees of God. But let us attend to what the scriptures further say. Luke 22. 22. "And truly the Son of man goeth as it was *determined*." Mark 14. 21. "The Son of man indeed

goeth as it is *written* of him." The circumstances attending the apprehension, condemnation and death of Christ depended upon the wills of men, and upon their wicked wills too; but they were all fore-determined, for he went exactly "*as it was determined.*" Acts 2. 23. "Him, being delivered by the *determinate counsel* and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Acts 4. 27, 28. "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast annointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for *to do whatsoever*" (observe, it is neither more nor less, but *whatsoever*;) "thy hand and thy counsel *determined before* to be done." The betraying, condemning, mocking, scourging, and crucifying the Lord of glory, was certainly great and aggravated wickedness; but it was all decreed. It was "*determined*" that he should go in this manner, being betrayed by Judas. It was God's "*determinate counsel*" that Herod and Pilate, the Gentiles and people of Israel, should do all this to him. But they did it with "*wicked hands.*" It was impossible that they should do it with any other than wicked hands. The apostle speaks of some, 1st Peter 2. 8. "Which stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were *appointed.*" They were appointed to stumble, appointed to be disobedient. God had also decreed the wicked-

ness of the Egyptians in oppressing the Israelites, the wickedness of Pharaoh in refusing to let Israel go, the wickedness of Sihon in coming out to fight against Israel at Jahaz, the wickedness of Eli's sons in refusing to listen to their father's reproof, the wickedness of Absalom in raising a rebellion against his father, and in committing incest with his father's wives, the wickedness of the king of Assyria in distressing Hezekiah and Jerusalem, the wickedness of Nebuchadnezzar in destroying so many nations to gratify his ambition, and a multitude of other sins, which are foretold in the sacred volume. If he had not determined that these things should take place, he could not have foretold or foreknown that they would take place. When he foretold them, he must have intended that his word should be accomplished, or that it should fail. We have no reason to believe he intended that his word should fail. When he directed the prophet to say that these things should come to pass, he must have intended that they should come to pass. He intended that the event should accord with the prophecy, and not disagree with it. He intended that the prediction should prove true, and not that it should prove false. God has also decreed the eternal state of angels and men. We read of "*elect* angels," and Jude 6, of those who are "*reserved* in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day." Of men, God

has appointed some to be "vessels of mercy, and some to be vessels of wrath," "some to honor, and some to dishonor." The scripture says, Acts 13. 48. "As many as were *ordained to eternal life* believed." Observe, it is not said, *as many as believed were ordained to eternal life*, as if believing was first, and in order to election, as the cause of it, according to the opinion of some, but the contrary. Election was *unto* obedience. They were elected to obey. They believed because they were ordained to believe and be saved. Peter says, 1 Peter 1. 2. "*Elect*, according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, *unto obedience* and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Election was *unto* obedience, not obedience unto election. And Paul says, Eph. 1. 4. "According as he hath *chosen* us in him before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy*." Not because they were holy, or it was foreseen they would be holy, but that they might be. And the assertion is express, "he hath chosen us *before the foundation of the world*." He elected them from eternity. Our Lord says, Mat. 11. 25, 26. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast *hid* these things from the wise and prudent, and hast *revealed* them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." These things were revealed to some, that they might be saved, and hidden from others, that they

might be lost. Mat. 13. 11. "It is *given* unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." But as the knowledge of these mysteries was necessary to eternal life, it was given to some and not to others, that some might be saved and others not. John 6. 37. "All that the Father *giveth* me shall come to me." He does not say, *all that come to me, the Father will give me*, as if it depended upon them solely, and not upon God's decree, how many should come. Verse 65. "No man can come unto me, except it were *given* unto him of my Father." But to some it is not given. See Mat. 13. 11. before cited. John 15. 16. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have *chosen* you." That is, Christ chose them first. The apostle says, 1 Thess. 5. 9. "For God hath not *appointed* us to wrath, but to obtain salvation." Implying that he had appointed others to wrath, while he appointed *them* to salvation. The prophet says, Is. 28. 13. "The word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; *that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.*" The word of the Lord was to them the savor of death unto death, and it was sent to them, not that they might be saved, but "that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken." In 2 Thess. 2. 13. it is said, "God hath, from the

beginning, *chosen YOU* to salvation." But if he has chosen some to salvation, and not all, he has chosen the rest to perdition. Jude speaks of certain wicked men, verse 4, who "crept in unawares, who were before of old *ordained* to this condemnation." Peter speaks of some, 2 Peter 2. 12. of whom he says, "But these, as natural brute beasts, *made to be taken and destroyed*, speak evil of the things that they understand not, and shall utterly perish in their own corruption." They were "*made to be taken and destroyed.*" Prov. 16. 4. "The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even *the wicked for the day of evil.*" He has made the wicked for the day of evil, to answer some important purpose in that day.

Thus, then, it appears that we have abundant scripture evidence that God has decreed all events in the natural and moral world, the state, character, and condition of angels and men, here and hereafter, with all their conduct, good and evil; in other words, that he has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.

Having established the first proposition, the way is prepared to proceed to the

II. Which was to show that God executes his decrees by his own agency; or, in other words, that God, having decreed all things, does himself actually work all things, after the counsel of his own will.

When it is said that God executes his decrees by his own agency, it is meant, that God does not merely *permit* his creatures to act as they do, as some say, but that, having decreed all the motions and actions of all his creatures, he does, by his own agency, cause and bring to pass all those motions and actions. Not that God is the only agent in the universe, and that creatures do not move and act, but that they are so dependent upon God, that they never move and act any further, nor in any other way, than they are caused to move and act by the immediate operation of divine power. Not that God does not work by means, but that means in themselves have no efficacy. Not that he does not make use of instrumental, or what are termed second causes, but that he actually causes the operations of these second causes themselves. So that he not only makes the rain to descend and the sun to shine, but by his agency also makes the grass to grow, and the corn to spring: and if this agency was not employed, the influence of the rain and the sun never would produce the effect. So that he not only presents motives to the understanding of his intelligent creatures, but by his agency also causes their wills to act in the view of those motives; and that if this agency was not employed, their wills would never act. That God does thus work all things after the counsel of his own will, is evident,

1. From the nature of creatures. They are dependent. The very idea of a creature, is of something that is dependent upon its creator; dependent for all that it has, all that it is, and all that it does. An independent creature is a contradiction. Independence is an attribute of God alone, and cannot in the nature of the thing be communicated. To say that a being is independent, and yet that he received his independence from another, is to say that he is independent, and yet dependent upon another, which is a contradiction. To say that a being may be independent in any one respect, though not in others, and yet that he received that independence which he has, is also a contradiction, for it makes him dependent and independent in the same respect. To say that creatures are dependent on God for their being, for the continuance of their lives, and for all their powers, but yet not dependent on him for their actions; or in other words, that God has created, and preserves them, and given them a power of acting independently of him, runs into the same absurdity. For it is the same as to say, that they have an independent power of acting for which they are dependent; that is, that they have a species of independence which is dependent. The supposition of an independent power of acting in the creatures, is also attended with this further difficulty, that it renders it impossible for God to control their actions, so that his de-

crees may fail, and his whole plan be defeated. A being cannot be controlled any farther than he is dependent. If the creature is dependent on God for his power of acting, but not for the exercise of that power, then it is impossible for God to control the exercise of that power, in any other way than by withdrawing the power itself. If, then, that power of acting is continued, the creature will be as likely to exercise it in direct opposition to the decree of God, as in conformity to that decree. And thus, although God has decreed that the creature shall will and act in a particular manner, it will still be uncertain whether he will not will and act in a manner directly the contrary. If Pharaoh had a power of acting independently of God, then, although God had decreed he should not let Israel go till he had sent his ten plagues upon him, he might have let them go at the first solicitation, and it would have been impossible for God to prevent it. And the supposition of an independent power of acting in the creature is equally inconsistent with the divine fore-knowledge. For if the creature has an independent power of acting, it is impossible to know beforehand how he will exercise it. He is as likely to exercise it in one way as in another. It is perfectly uncertain how he will act, till he does act. An independent power of acting, and a previous certainty how a man will act, are totally inconsistent with each other. For if it is previously certain

that he will act in one particular way, it is as impossible that he should act in any other way, as it is that a thing should be certain and uncertain at the same time. If man has an independent power of acting, and his choice is not influenced by any thing extrinsic to himself, he may act either way. And although God has foreknown that he would act in one way, he may still act in a manner directly the contrary. And thus, God may infallibly know a thing will come to pass, which yet never will come to pass, which is a contradiction. It is evident, then, that if God has infallibly decreed all the motions and actions of his creatures, that he executes those decrees by causing all their motions and actions. Or, if we do not say he has decreed, but only say he foreknows all their motions and actions, it is equally certain that they are entirely dependent on him for all their motions and actions, as much as for their existence.

2. It is also evident from the nature of our motions and actions. They are *effects*. Every thing which has not existed from eternity, but come into existence in time, is an effect, and must have a cause. To say that they are not effects, and have no cause, is to say that some things may come into existence without a cause. And if some things may come into existence without a cause, then all things may come into existence without a cause. And thus we run into atheism.

If our actions are effects, and have a cause, then God must be the cause, or we ourselves must be the cause, or some other creature must be the cause. But every cause must operate, in order to produce its effect. No effect follows from a cause, without the operation of the cause. And that operation is not the effect itself, but is the causing act by which the effect is produced. If, then, we are the cause of our own actions, we must cause them by a causing act; that is, we must operate in order to produce the effect. But this operation, or causing act, is an action also, and needs to be accounted for, as much as the other. If we are the cause of that also, we must, in causing it, have performed a previous action; and in causing that previous action, we must have performed another previous to that, and so on, till we come back to our first action; and in causing our first action, we must have performed another previous to it, that is, we acted before we acted, or performed an action before the first, which is a gross absurdity. The only way of avoiding this absurdity, is by saying that we cause our own actions without a causing act, or without doing any thing to cause them; that we produce our own actions without making any exertion to produce them, and without any intention of doing it; that in a sovereign, independent manner we determine what our acts of will shall be, without exercising any power to determine them, or per-

forming any determining act. But this entirely subverts the meaning of language, and contradicts common sense. To *cause*, to *produce*, to *determine*, are words which denote activity, which signify that some *exertion* is made, in order to effect something. And the thing effected by this *exertion* is the action which is thus caused or produced. That which does nothing in order to produce an effect, is no cause of that effect. To say that we cause our own volitions or actions, when we put forth no exertion to cause them, is as absurd as to say, that any other thing causes them, which puts forth no exertion. I can as soon believe that another man causes my actions, without his making any exertion in order to do it, or that a stock or a stone causes them, as I can believe that I cause them myself, without making any exertion in order to cause them. That which does nothing in order to produce an effect, does not produce any effect, and is no cause. It is certain, therefore, that if we cause our own actions, we must cause them by making some exertions, or performing previous actions; which brings us to the absurdity of performing one action before the first. It is evident, then, that we are not the cause of our own actions. Shall we say, then, that any other creature is the cause? For instance, shall we say that Satan is the cause of our wicked actions? This will run into the same absurdity. For, if Satan causes one of our

actions, he does it by a causing act of his own; and he must have caused that by a previous act, and so on, till we bring him to an act before the first. If, then, we are not the cause of our own actions, and no other creature is the cause of them, it follows that God is the cause of them.

Some have said that our actions are caused by *motives*, and not by the agency of God. They have represented motive as acting with a kind of mechanical influence upon the mind, as the springs do upon the wheels of a watch, and causing its volitions as the latter do the motions of the wheels. They have represented that God has established certain laws in the moral, as well as in the natural world, and that mind is governed by these laws, as well as matter, without any immediate agency of God. That, as when the artist has completed his watch, put every thing in order, wound it up, and set it in motion, it is not necessary for him to put his hands to the wheels to make them go, so, God having made all things, and established these laws, it is wholly unnecessary for him to put forth an immediate agency to bring to pass any event. Others have adopted this system in part only, and supposed that it is necessary that God should put forth an immediate agency to cause all the good actions of his creatures, but not their wicked actions; and have said that it was only necessary for God to remove restraints from wicked men, and they would as cer-

tainly act wickedly, as a heavy body would descend to the earth if that which supported it was taken away. If we ask, why a heavy body descends under these circumstances, the reply is, it is by a law of nature: the attraction of gravitation causes it to descend. And if we ask, why the man acts wickedly when God takes off his restraints, the reply is, it is by a law of nature: he is then under the influence of bad motives. What then is meant by the laws of nature? Is there some inherent power in things, which operates, and produces all the admirable effects which we behold, and this as much independently of God, as the motions of a watch are independent of the artist who made it? No. This is not the case. It certainly is not, in the material world. Matter is a substance wholly senseless and inactive. It is not capable of putting forth any exertion, or producing any effect. By the laws of nature, in the material world, we always mean the established mode of divine operation. When God exerts his power to produce effects in the material world, in a uniform manner, we call it a law of nature. He uniformly causes heavy bodies to gravitate to the centre of the earth. It is, therefore, said to be a law of nature, that heavy bodies should always tend to the centre. And in like manner, if we speak of the mind's being governed by certain laws, the only thing we can mean is, that God governs it,

by his immediate agency, according to certain established modes. The term *motive* is not always used in a definite manner. We sometimes use it to signify the mental exertion or act of the will itself. As when we speak of a man's external conduct, and inquire whether he was praise or blame worthy, we ask what were his motives? The meaning then is, what were the volitions or acts of will, which produced such external conduct? When we use motive in this sense, and say that motive is the cause of action, we mean that volition is the cause of external action. And even then, we only mean instrumental cause. But when we are inquiring for the cause of volition, or internal action, and speak of motive, we mean by it the object of the choice, the external thing chosen. When motive is taken in this sense, motive is not the cause of choice. It is true, that in this sense of motive, the mind never acts without a motive, but that is only saying, the mind never chooses without an object which is chosen. But the object chosen, and the cause of choice, are very different things. An object presented to the mind, is a motive to choose, but it is the immediate agency of God alone that can cause the mind to act when the motive is presented. If it is said, therefore, to be a law of nature, that the same motives should produce the same effects upon the mind, and cause it to act, under the same circumstances, in the same way,

the only thing that can be meant is, that God, by his agency, causes the mind, in the same circumstances, and in the view of the same motives, to act in a uniform manner.

SERMON III.

EPHESIANS I. 11.

Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

WE proceed with the proof of the second proposition, which is, that God executes his decrees by his own agency.

3. That God, by his agency, brings to pass whatever comes to pass, is evident from scripture. The text asserts it in the plainest and strongest terms. "*Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*" It does not say *some* things, but *all* things. It does not say he *permits* all things to take place, after the counsel of his own will, but that he himself "**WORKETH** all things after the counsel of his own will." His universal agency is also asserted in the following scriptures: Rom. 11, 36. "For *of him*, and through him, and to him, are all things." Not, some things *of him*, and some things *of ourselves*. Acts 17. 28. "For in him," (that is, *by him*,) "we live, and *move*, and have our being." Not, in him we

live, but move *in* and *by ourselves*. 2 Cor. 3. 5. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think *any thing*, as of ourselves." It does not say, we are not able to think any *good thing*, as it is frequently quoted, but *any thing, any thing whatever*, whether good or evil. And if we are not able to think, we are not able to act of ourselves. Job 23. 13, 14. "He is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he *doeth*. For he *performeth* the thing that is appointed for me." That is, he never changes his mind, but whatever he desires should come to pass, he brings to pass; and since he "desireth," that is, chooses, or decrees, whatsoever comes to pass, he "doeth" or "performeth" whatsoever comes to pass, that is, he brings it to pass by his own agency. 1 Cor. 12. 6. "*It is the same God which WORKETH ALL IN ALL.*" This assertion is universal and unlimited, though some would wish to limit it. It is not said, it is the same God who worketh all good things in all good men, but (*panta en pasi*,) *all things in all things*. Mat. 10. 29, 30. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Surely, if a sparrow or a hair of our head cannot fall on the ground without the agency of God, the divine agency is universal. Jer. 10. 23. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is

not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Prov. 16. 9. "A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord *directeth* his steps." But they are all directed by his own will. Therefore, God directs them by directing his will. Verse 33. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Dan. 4. 17. "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and *setteth up* over it the basest of men." The rise and fall of kingdoms depend upon the wills of men: consequently, God directs their wills. Mat. 6. 26. "Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." Ps. 104. 27, 28. "These wait all upon thee, that thou may give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them, they gather; thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good." Amos 3. 6. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not *done it*?" Is. 45. 6, 7. "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I *form* the light, and *create* darkness; I make peace, and *create* evil. I the Lord do all these things." It would be difficult to find language to express the universal agency of God in stronger terms than these passages express it. With respect to the last two, it is indeed objected, that they have reference only to natural evil. But there appears to be no foundation for this objection. The interrogation, "shall

there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" denies the existence of any evil, of any kind, which the Lord had not caused. And the last passage quoted, "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil," is addressed to Cyrus, a Persian, who believed there were two gods, equally independent and almighty, of which one caused all the good, natural and moral, that takes place in the universe, and the other all the evil; as some appear to believe, at the present day. To correct this error, the Lord tells Cyrus that he alone is God, and causes all these things himself.

That God by his agency causes whatever takes place in the natural world, will not perhaps be denied. Ps. 104. 14, &c. "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man. He watereth the hills from his chambers. He sendeth the springs into the vallies, which run among the hills." Ps. 147. 16, 17, 18. "He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoar frost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: He causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow." Ps. 104. 19. "He appointeth the moon for seasons; the sun knoweth his going down." Job 9. 8, 10. "Which alone spreadeth out the heavens. Which doeth great things past finding out." That God causes natural evil, pain, sickness and

death, will also be granted. Job 5. 6, 18. "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground. He maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole." Deut. 32. 39. "I, even I am he, and there is no God with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal." Ps. 102. 23. "He weakened my strength in the way: he shortened my days." But natural evil often comes by the instrumentality of wicked men, and death often by the hand of the murderer. Therefore, if it is God that kills, then it is he that directs the hand of the murderer, and that governs his will.

That God causes the good actions of his creatures must also be granted. To the Philippians the apostle says, Phil. 2. 13. "It is God which WORKETH IN YOU both *to will* and *to do* of his good pleasure." They will and do, but God causes them to will and do. Repentance is his gift. Acts 5. 31. Christ is "exalted—to *give* repentance to Israel." 2 Tim. 2. 25. "God, peradventure, will *give* them repentance." But it is a voluntary exercise, and men are exhorted and commanded to repent. Faith is the gift of God, and it is also the voluntary exercise of the creature. Eph. 2. 8. "Faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." And Christ is called, Heb. 12. 2. "the *author* and *finisher* of our faith." And yet we are exhorted to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Love is his gift. 1

John 4. 7. "Love one another: for love is of God." But it is a voluntary exercise, and is the sum of what God requires of us. We are dependent on God for all gracious exercises. Gal. 5. 22, 23. "But the *fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." All these are exercises of the creature, but they are produced in him by the Holy Ghost. A new heart is the gift of God; and it is also the voluntary exercise of the creature. Ezek. 36. 26. "A new heart also will I *give* you, and a new spirit will I *put* within you; and I will *take away* the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." And yet we are commanded, Ezek. 18. 31. "Make you a new heart, and a new spirit." We cannot walk in God's statutes without *choosing*. That is no obedience, which is not voluntary. But God says, Ezek. 36. 27. "I will put my spirit within you, and *cause you to walk in my statutes*, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." He promises to cause them to choose. The Psalmist says, Ps. 119. 32, &c. "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. *Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, Incline my heart* unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness." He prays God to *make him to*

go, and to *incline his heart*, which can mean nothing else than causing him to choose.

Let us now attend to some scriptures which assert the agency of God in causing the wicked actions of his creatures. Prov. 21. 1. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, *he turneth it whithersoever he will.*" If he has decreed he shall commit sin, *he turneth it* to commit sin. Ps. 105. 25. "*He turned their heart* to hate his people." Hating his people was a voluntary exercise, and a very wicked one; but God "turned their heart" to do it. The Psalmist prays, Ps. 141. 4. "Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity." It would be highly improper to pray thus, if God never did such things, and especially if he could not do such things without bringing a stain upon his character. The Psalmist also prays, as before cited, "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness," which implies that God does, sometimes, incline the heart to covetousness. Rev. 17. 17. "For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree and give their kingdom unto the beast." To give their kingdom to the beast, and not to God, was a great sin; but God "put in their hearts" to do it. The inspired prophet says, Isa. 63. 17. "O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?" To err from

God's ways, is to sin; but, it seems, God had made them do it. 2 Sam. 24. 1. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." It is indeed said, in 1 Chron. 21. 1. "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." But there is no contradiction here. One passage speaks of the agency God had in it, and the other of the agency Satan had in it. Both are true, and they are perfectly consistent with each other. Satan tempted David, and God caused him to choose, or "moved" him to comply. And besides, Satan is only God's instrument. But when David had done it, he says, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done." And God punished him with the pestilence for it. If this language does not express the agency of God in causing wicked actions, in what language can it be expressed? But let us proceed. Isa. 53. 10, &c. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." He was "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." How did God bruise his Son, and smite him? Manifestly, by causing wicked men to do it; for otherwise it could not be said that the Lord bruised him. Acts 3. 18. "But those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled." That is, God hath so fulfilled, by causing wicked men to bruise his Son and smite

him, as he had decreed and foretold. Gen. 45. 5, &c. Joseph says to his brethren, "Now, therefore, be not grieved, for God did send me before you to preserve life. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth. So now, it was not you that sent me hither, but God." How did God send Joseph into Egypt? Manifestly, by causing his brethren to send him there. But Joseph says to them, Gen. 50. 20. "As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good." God had a good design to accomplish through the instrumentality of their wickedness, though they meant no such thing. God calls the king of Assyria the "rod of his anger," and says, Isa. 10. 6. "I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge." He afterwards calls it his work, which the Assyrian did, and asserts his own agency in performing it. Verse 12. "When the Lord hath performed his whole work" (that is, by the Assyrian, as his instrument,) "upon Mount Zion, and on Jerusalem"—He then declares that he will punish the Assyrian for his pride and stoutness of heart, in boasting as if he had done it, by the strength of his hand, when he was only God's instrument, and says, verse 15. "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if the rod should shake itself against them

that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself as if it were no wood." Here it appears, that God sent him, and God performed the work; which could not have been the case, unless God caused him to do it. And the Assyrian is represented as much God's instrument, and as much moved by him in all this business, as the rod, and the saw, and the axe, by the hand of the workman. (See the whole passage.) He calls the king of Babylon his "battle-axe, and weapons of war;" "for with thee, (says he) will I break in pieces the nations." Jer. 51. 20. And again, verse 7. "Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken." He calls it also, Jer. 50. 23. "The hammer of the whole earth." Now, God could not be said to do what the king of Babylon did, unless he caused him to do it as his instrument, and as really employed his own agency, as the man does who moves an axe, a hammer, or a rod, with his hand. God asserts his agency in causing the Medes and Persians to come against Babylon. Jer. 50. 9. "For lo, I will raise, and cause to come up against Babylon, an assembly of great nations from the north country." Verse 25. "The Lord hath opened his armory, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation: for this is the work of the Lord God of Hosts in the land of the Chaldeans." He asserts his agency in causing the Syrians to come against Israel. Isa.

9. 11. "The Lord shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together." But these instruments had no regard to God in what they did. It was all to gratify their own wicked passions. It is said, 1 Kings 11. 14. "The Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite." And verse 23, 25. "God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah; and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria." God asserts his agency in bringing the armies against Judah. 2 Kings 24. 2. "And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it." But they had no regard to God in all this, and were afterwards severely punished for their wickedness in doing it; as appears from the prophecies against them. 1 Chron. 5. 26. "And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgathpilneser, king of Assyria, and he carried them away." He, that is, God, carried them away, by the instrumentality of these wicked kings. In 2 Chron. 11. 4. speaking of the rebellion of Jeroboam and the ten tribes, it is said, "Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren; for this thing is done of me." In 2 Chron. 21. 16. it is said, "Moreover, the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the

Arabians, and they came up into Judah, and brake into it." Isa. 13. 17. Respecting Babylon God says, "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them." Isa. 46. 10, 11. Respecting Cyrus, God says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure; calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it." Jer. 25. 9. Respecting the Jews, he says, "Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Lord, and Nebuchadrezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land." When one nation has executed the judgments of God upon another, by plundering, oppressing, and destroying it, in a most barbarous and wicked manner, then God raises up another, and makes use of it, as his sword, for the punishment of the first; and afterwards raises up another for the punishment of that, and so on. God is the prime agent, and they are his "hand," his "sword," his "rod," his "battle-axe," to use the language of scripture, that is, they are the instruments by which he executes his vengeance. Zech. 8. 10. Speaking of the former state of the Jews, God says, "Neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in, because of the affliction: for I SET all men every one against his neighbor." Observe, it is not said he merely suffered them to

fall upon one another, but he actually set them one against another. Judges 9. 23. It is said, "Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem." And the consequence was, that they immediately fell to destroying one another. He did something more than to take off restraints, he "sent an evil spirit." And 1 Kings 22. 23. the prophet tells Ahab, "The Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets." The design of God was, to persuade Ahab to go to Ramoth-Gilead, that he might fall there; and to effect this, he "put a lying spirit" in the mouth of Ahab's false prophets, and caused them to promise him success. (See the whole passage.) To David God says, 2 Sam. 12. 11. "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun." This could only be fulfilled by his causing the wicked conduct of Absalom. Job says, chap. 1. 21. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." But it was Satan and wicked men that had taken away all that he had. Now, if God did it, he must have done it by causing them to do it, as his instruments. When God sent Moses with his message to Pharaoh, he said to Moses, Exod. 4. 21. "But I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go." This hardness of heart

was not a defect in Pharaoh's natural powers, for which he would have been excusable, but it was wilful wickedness, it was obstinacy and opposition to God; as appears from the whole history: and God declares that he caused it. He says again, chap. 7. 3. "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart." Verse 13. "And he hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said." Chap. 9. 12. "And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had spoken unto Moses." Verse 14—16. God says to Pharaoh, "For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." These plagues, which God said he would send upon his heart, could be nothing else than that wicked obstinacy or hardness of heart which he caused in him, and which was productive of such terrible consequences. After the plague of hail, it is said, verse 27, 28. "And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are

wicked. Entreat the Lord (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer." Here Pharaoh seemed willing to let them go, and gave his consent; but the Lord hardened his heart, so that he withdrew the consent he had given, and again refused to let them go. Verse 35. "And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened." Chap. 10. 1. "And the Lord said unto Moses, go in unto Pharaoh: for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants." After the plague of the locusts, it is said, verse 16—20. "Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now, therefore, forgive, I pray thee, my sin, only this once, and entreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only. And he went out from Pharaoh, and entreated the Lord. But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go." After the plague of the darkness, it is said, verse 24. "And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the Lord." Verse 27. "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go." Here it appears that the reason why Pharaoh did not let them go, was, that the Lord hardened his heart, and caused him to refuse. Chap. 11. 9, 10. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that my wonders may be

multiplied in the land of Egypt. And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land." After the death of the first-born, it is said, chap. 12. 30, 31. "And Pharaoh rose up in the night, and he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people." Verse 33. "And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, we be all dead men." But the Lord said to Moses, chap. 14. 4. "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honored upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host." Verse 5. "And the heart of Pharaoh, and of his servants, was turned against the people." Compare this with Ps. 105. 25, and it will appear that it was God who turned their heart against his people. Verse 8. "And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel." When they came to the Red Sea, God said to Moses, verse 15. "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:" verse 17. "And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them; and I will get me honor upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen." Verse 31. "And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the

Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and his servant Moses." It has been said that God did nothing to Pharaoh's heart, but only withdrew his restraints. But if the language which God uses, when speaking of it, does not express a positive and powerful agency, it would be difficult to find any language that could. And those who make the objection are so sensible that this is the natural and obvious meaning of the words, that when they speak on the same subject, they very carefully avoid the language which God uses, and express themselves in softer terms. But if our sentiments lead us to reject and condemn the language which God uses, we have reason to conclude that our sentiments are wrong. It cannot be said that this case of Pharaoh was a singular one, and that God does not deal in this manner with other men; for the Psalmist says, Ps. 33. 13, 15. "The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. He fashioneth their hearts alike." That is, as the Septuagint has it, "He fashioneth their hearts each one." God makes every man's heart what it is. With respect to Sihon, the agency of God is expressed, if possible, in still stronger terms. Deut. 2. 30. "But Sihon, king of Heshbon, would not let us pass by him; for the Lord thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate." No one, it is thought, will say that this obstinacy of heart was not wickedness of heart. But God "made

his heart obstinate." With respect to the kings of the Canaanites, whom Joshua destroyed, it is said, Josh. 11. 20. "For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favor." The apostle, after quoting the case of Pharaoh to illustrate God's general method of dealing with his creatures, draws this conclusion, Rom. 9. 18. "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." He teaches the same truth also in the simile of the potter and the clay, verse 21, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" The potter forms his vessels, and fits them for the various uses for which he designs them. One vessel he designs for an honorable use, and he forms it such as to be fit for that use. Another he designs for a dishonorable use, and he forms it such as to be fit for that use. If this comparison is in point, the apostle teaches us, that God not only designs one to be a "vessel of mercy," and another to be a "vessel of wrath," but actually forms them such as to be fit for these uses. That is, he forms their characters, by causing one to perform holy actions, and so making him holy, and fitting him for glory, and causing another to perform wicked actions, and so making him a sinner, and fitting him for destruction.

The same truth is also taught in those scriptures which represent God as blinding the mind, closing the eyes, giving the spirit of slumber, deceiving and deluding men. This blindness is altogether the blindness of the heart. It is wholly criminal. It is nothing but wilful wickedness. Any other blindness would not answer the purpose for which this is evidently designed, that is, to fit them for destruction. Isa. 6. 9, 10. "And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Alluding to this passage, John says, chap. 12. 39, 40. "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." And the apostle says, Rom. 11. 7, 8. "And the rest were blinded, according as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear, unto this day." Respecting Egypt, it is said, Isa. 19. 13, 14. "The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived. The Lord hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof." To the Jews, the

prophet says, Isa. 29. 10. "The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes; the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered." Respecting the false prophets, God says, Ezek. 14. 9. "If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet; and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him." Job says to God, chap. 17. 4. "For thou hast hid their heart from understanding: therefore shalt thou not exalt them." Again, he says, chap. 12. 6, &c. "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? With him is strength and wisdom; the deceived and the deceiver are his. He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged. He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man." The royal preacher says, Eccl. 3. 10, 11. "I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart:

so that no man can find out the work that God maketh, from the beginning to the end." To Ezekiel, chap. 20. 25, 26. God says, when speaking of his giving up the Jews to idolatry, "Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live: And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the Lord." And the apostle says, II Thess. 2. 11, 12. "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

But the time would fail me to enumerate all the scripture evidence in favor of this important and fundamental doctrine of the gospel. The evidence already adduced is more than sufficient. Surely, if God "moves" men to do wickedly, as he did David, to number the people; if he "inclines their hearts to evil," as the Psalmist prays he would not his; if he "stirs them up" to do wrong, as he did Hadad, and so many others; if he "puts in their hearts" to commit sin, as he did in those of the kings of the earth to give their kingdom to the beast; if he "turns their hearts" to wickedness, as he did those of the Egyptians to hate his people; if he "makes them to err from his ways," as he did the prophet and others;

if he declares that "he does" what the wicked are represented as doing, as in the case of the king of Assyria, and others; if he "blinds and hardens" them, as he did Pharaoh, and others; if he "makes their hearts obstinate," as he did Sihon's; and "sets them one against another," as he did the Jews of old, according to the express declarations of scripture; there cannot be any doubt but that he works in men to will and do whatever they will and do, that he does, by his own agency, cause all their motions and actions, that he does "work all things after the counsel of his own will."

SERMON IV.

EPHESIANS I. 11.

Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

HAVING shown that God has decreed, or fore-ordained, whatsoever comes to pass, and that he executes his decrees by his own agency, we come now, as was proposed,

III. To attend to some OBJECTIONS which are made against this doctrine.

Objection 1. It is said that this doctrine destroys free agency, and makes men machines; that if God worketh all things, then creatures do not work any thing; that if God, by his agency, causes every thing that takes place, then creatures have no agency at all, and God is the only agent in the universe.

Answer. To understand this objection, and ascertain its force, it will be necessary to inquire what is a free agent, and what is a machine. A free agent is one who chooses, or wills. If an object is set before any being, and he exercises

choice respecting it, he is a free agent. A machine has no *will*. It never *chooses*. The brute animals choose, and are therefore free agents. But they have no perception of right and wrong, and therefore, are not moral agents. Men have conscience, by which they feel the distinction between right and wrong, and are, therefore, free moral agents. The machines with which we are acquainted have no intelligence, no reason, and no conscience, as well as no will. They are not only incapable of choice, but incapable of perception too. A being, however, with intelligence, reason and conscience, would be a machine still, if he had no power of choosing. He could not be a free agent. Free agency, therefore, consists in choosing, and in nothing else. If any thing else is necessary to free agency, what is it? Is it that our acts of choice should come to pass by chance, without any cause? Is a free agent one whose actions have no motive, are guided by no reason, and directed to no end? Is a free agent like one exposed in the open sea, upon a single plank, without compass, oar, or sail, the sport of winds and waves? Such free agency no one can desire. If our actions come to pass by mere chance, without any cause, then intelligence, reason, and conscience, are worse than useless. It would be better to be a machine, in the hands of a wise and benevolent artist. It would be better to be a senseless block, than to be thus the sport

of mere blind contingency, and have intelligence, reason, and conscience, to aggravate our misery. But this supposition is impossible, for nothing comes into existence without a cause. Is it necessary, then, to our free agency, that we should cause our own acts of choice? This is the ground usually taken by those who deny the doctrine which has been supported in these discourses. Let us, then, examine it carefully. It is thought that we cause our own acts of choice, and that no one can be a free agent unless he does so; and consequently, that if God should cause our acts of choice, it would destroy our free agency. Perhaps, however, it can be shown that it is not essential to free agency that we should cause our own acts of choice; and not only so, but that it is impossible we should cause them, impossible in the very nature of things. It will be admitted by all, that God is a free agent. If any being in the universe acts freely, it must be that God does. He is infinite in power, and there is no superior being to lay him under any restraints. God, then, is a perfect free agent. If, therefore, it is necessary to free agency that a being should cause his own acts of choice, God must cause his. But this he does not do. His acts of choice have no cause, for they are eternal. By acts of *choice*, are here meant *determinations*, those acts of the mind which are confined within the mind itself, and not external operations: and

by *cause*, is meant the *efficient* or producing cause, and not the reason or motive. God's determinations have a reason, but not a cause. They are all eternal. But the producing cause must exist before the effects which it produces. Therefore, the producing cause of God's eternal determinations must have existed before eternity, which is absurd. Consequently, the divine determinations have no cause. To deny that the divine determinations are eternal, is to deny that God is immutable; it is saying God is not "in one mind," as the scriptures say he is. And if he changes his mind, and makes new determinations, it is because he discovers some new reasons for his new determinations, which he did not know before. That is, he did not know all things from eternity. But this makes God a very imperfect, ignorant, changeable being. It makes him no God at all; it is blank atheism. He, therefore, did know all things from eternity, and never sees any reason to change his determinations, which have always been the same from eternity. The divine determinations, therefore, being all eternal, cannot have a cause, any more than the being of God can have a cause. Since, therefore, God does not cause his own determinations, or acts of choice, and God is a free agent, it follows that a being may be a free agent without causing his own acts of choice. But it is not only unnecessary for us to cause our own acts of choice, in

order to be free agents, but it is impossible that we should cause them. In what way can we cause them? If we do it, we must do it voluntarily or involuntarily, that is, intentionally or unintentionally. Do we do it involuntarily, that is, without intending it? But if we do it without intending it, there is no free agency in that. Whatever we do involuntarily, we do as machines; or rather, it is not we that do it at all. Do we, then, cause our own acts of choice voluntarily? Do we do it by intending to do it? But to say we intend to do it, is the same as to say, we determine to do it, we choose to do it. Do we, then, cause an act of choice, by choosing to put it forth? Do we choose to choose? Here, then, are two acts of choice, by one of which we caused the other. But what caused the first of them? Did we cause that, by choosing it? There is no other way in which we could cause it. Did we choose to choose to choose? Here, then, are three acts of choice, the first causing the second, and the second causing the third. But what caused the first? Did we cause that by a previous choice, and that previous choice by another previous to it, and so on? What, then, caused the first in the whole series? Did we cause that? If we caused that, it must have been by choosing or willing it. That is, we caused our first act of choice by another previous to it, or by one before the first, which is absurd. It is, therefore, impos-

sible in the nature of things, for any being to cause his own acts of choice. And consequently, free agency does not consist in causing our own acts of choice. But it consists simply in choosing. If an object is presented to our minds, and we exercise choice respecting it, we are free agents, and it is impossible for any being in the universe to be more so. The doctrine supported in these discourses, is, that God causes us to choose. But free agency consists in choosing. Therefore, if God causes us to choose, he causes us to be free agents. To destroy our free agency, and make us machines, he must cause us **NOT** to choose. This doctrine, therefore, is so far from destroying free agency, that it is the very thing which secures it. There is no liberty possible or conceivable greater than of acting voluntarily. But when God causes us to choose, he causes us to act voluntarily. When God causes us to choose, therefore, he causes us to enjoy and exercise the greatest liberty that is possible for any being in the universe, the greatest liberty that can be desired, or that can be conceived. The doctrine which has been supported in these discourses, therefore, is so far from infringing upon the doctrine of free agency, that the doctrine of free agency rests upon it, as upon a foundation that cannot be shaken.

But some say, that, if God causes us to choose, then it is God's choice, and not ours; we have no

choice at all. It is God in us that wills and does, loves and hates, and performs all our actions, and we do nothing. Let us ask any such person whether he breathes. Do you breathe, or not? You certainly do. But God causes you to breathe. And it is not God's breath, but your own. And God's causing you to breathe, has no tendency to stop you from breathing, but the contrary. "God causes you to live; but this does not destroy your life. God causes you to move, but this does not hinder nor destroy your motion. So, God causes you to will or choose; but this does not destroy your willing or choosing," or make your choice any the less your own. When God works in us to will and to do, we as really will and do, as God does. We act, while we are acted upon. God's agency is the cause of our agency. God's choice the cause of our choice. But the cause and the effect are distinct things, and ought not to be confounded. And those who intend to reason fairly, will not endeavor to confound them. The scriptures also abundantly teach the consistency of these two doctrines; and while they ascribe to God an agency in causing all the actions of men, they speak of those actions as truly and properly the actions of men. According to them, it is God that gives repentance, while it is man that repents. It is God that gives faith, while it is man that believes. It is God that causes man to walk in his statutes, while it

is man that walks in God's statutes. And it is man that works out his own salvation, while it is God that works in him both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Phil. 2. 12, 13.

Objection 2. It is said, that if this doctrine is true, then men cannot be to blame for any thing they do; that if God causes them to act as they do, in every instance, it is impossible they should be sinful; that if God moves them to commit that wickedness for which he punishes them, they are proper objects of pity, but cannot be criminal.

Answer. To give this objection any weight, one of two things must be taken for granted, either that we cannot act while acted upon, and so exercise no choice, or else that the blame worthiness does not lie in the nature of the choice itself, but in its cause. It is true that we must will or choose, in order to be blame worthy; and if the doctrine supported in these discourses destroys our willing or choosing, it destroys our blame worthiness. And if the blame worthiness lies in the cause of the choice, and not in the choice itself, and God is the cause of our choice, it is equally true that no blame will attach to us. But if both these grounds for the objection can be removed, the objection will be answered. Does, then, the agency of God destroy our agency? When God causes us to choose, does that prevent our choosing? When God works in us to will and do, does that hinder our willing or doing?

When God exerts his influence upon us, to make us act, do we not, under that influence, as really act, as any being in the universe? When God by his agency causes us to choose, we choose, as really as we breathe when God causes us to breathe, and the choice is our own. If, then, the criminality of an act of choice does not belong to us, it must be because the blame worthiness does not lie in the choice, but in its cause. But to say that the blame worthiness lies in the cause of the choice, and not in the nature of the choice itself, involves many absurdities. It is contrary to common sense. It is a dictate of common sense, that the quality of a thing lies in the nature of the thing itself, and not at all in any thing else. A murderous spirit is a bad spirit. It is odious in its own nature. And every good man abhors it, without waiting to inquire after its cause. And let its cause be what it may, that does not alter the nature of the thing itself, or render it any the less deserving of abhorrence. Serpents and toads are poisonous animals, and in themselves odious and disagreeable creatures. And God's having created them, does not alter their nature, or render them any the less disagreeable in themselves. And their disagreeable qualities lie wholly *in them*, and not at all in God, the cause of them. When we inquire into the moral conduct of others, we always direct our inquiry to the nature of the choice itself, to the disposition of heart with which

any thing was done, to the design or intention of the doer. And having satisfied ourselves on that head, we condemn or acquit accordingly, without any further inquiry. The common sense of every man, therefore, teaches that the blame worthiness lies in the nature of the choice itself, and not at all in its cause. But to say that the blame worthiness lies in the cause of the choice, is also attended with this absurdity, that it drives all blame worthiness out of the universe, or else fixes it all upon God, even though the doctrine advanced in these discourses should not be true. It takes away the blame from us, as much if we cause our own choice, as it does if God causes it. If we cause our own choice, we must do it voluntarily or involuntarily. Do we do it involuntarily? If so, no blame can attach to us; for the blame worthiness does not lie in the choice, but in its cause, and its cause is something perfectly involuntary. But to blame us for any thing perfectly involuntary, is absurd. No man ever feels to blame for any thing perfectly involuntary. Besides, if we cause an act of choice by an involuntary exertion, (if there could be any such thing,) that exertion must have some cause too, and that cause must have a previous cause, and that previous cause another previous to it, and so on. And thus, as we go backward in the chain of causes, we carry all the blame worthiness, from step to step, till we come back to the first cause. But the first cause

of all things is God. This course, then, removes all the blame from us to God, as much as if he caused our choice immediately by his own agency. Will it be said, then, that we cause our own choice voluntarily, that we choose to choose? This brings us back to a choice before the first. And all the blame belongs to that choice which was before the first; which drives it out of the universe. Will it be said, then, that the cause of our choice is some mysterious power in us, which produces it without any exertion, voluntary or involuntary? The blame of a particular choice, then, is transferred from the choice to this power, which is its cause. But it does not rest there, for that power must have some cause, and the blame must be transferred to the cause of that power, and so on again, from step to step, till we come back to the first cause, which brings it again to God. If it is said that we are the proper cause of our own choice, without pointing out any way in which we cause it, the result will be the same. If we are the cause, the blame is transferred from the choice to us; but it cannot rest on us, for we have a cause too. And thus, whatever course we take, this principle, that the blame belongs to the cause of the choice, and not to the choice itself, removes all the blame from us, and from *every thing which is an effect*, and either drives it out of the universe, or brings it back to God, the first cause of all things. If to avoid this absurdity, it should

be said that our choice has no cause, the difficulty will still remain. For if the blame belongs to the cause, and our choice has no cause, the blame belongs no where. But every one feels that there is blame worthiness somewhere, and that it does not belong to God, but to the creature. The blame worthiness, therefore, does not lie in the cause of the choice, but in the nature of the choice itself. And since we really choose, and our choice is our own, and the blame worthiness lies in the nature of the choice itself, the blame belongs entirely to us, let the cause of our choice be what it may. When God works in us to will and do, we really will and do, as much as if we were independent. Our actions are our own, and the criminality of them, if they are wrong, belongs entirely to us. And this every one feels, in his own breast, however some pretended philosophers have endeavored to persuade themselves to the contrary. Every one feels, in his own breast, that when he *acts voluntarily*, he is a proper subject of praise or blame, according as his actions are right or wrong. If he voluntarily does that which he knows he ought not, he is condemned of his own conscience, and all the metaphysical subtleties in the world cannot make him feel that he is not to blame. God "*moved*" David to number Israel; but David said, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy ser-

vant; for I have done very foolishly." He was conscious of doing wickedly, and God's having moved him to do as he had done, did not in the least degree diminish his guilt and desert of punishment, in God's view or his own: and he was punished in a terrible manner by the pestilence. God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, that he should not let his people go; but when he punished him for refusing to let them go, Pharaoh said, "The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked. I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you." Pharaoh did not feel any the less guilty, because God had hardened his heart, and caused him to do these things. And God did not consider him any the less guilty, but punished him in a most exemplary manner. Judas felt guilty, when he had betrayed his Lord, though he did neither more nor less than was before "determined" and "written" of him. Peter felt guilty, when he had denied his master, though it was not only decreed before hand that he should do so, but Peter knew it before hand, for our Lord had told him that he would deny him. And God every where in scripture considers and treats persons as guilty, when doing things in themselves improper, though they are acting under his decree and agency. "He turned the heart" of the Egyptians "to hate his people, and to deal subtly with his servants," Ps. 105. 25, but he punished them for their wickedness in so doing. He "put

in the hearts" of the kings of the earth "to agree and give their kingdom unto the beast," but he punished them for so doing, as appears from the context. He made use of the king of Assyria, as "the rod of his anger," to chastise a wicked people, and represents himself as employing his own agency, in the use of this instrument, as really as the man does, who moves a saw, an axe, or a rod, with his hand. But, nevertheless, God considers him as guilty, and says, Isa. 10. 12. "Wherefore, it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks." God "stirred up" the neighboring nations to come against Israel and Judah, and then sent the king of Babylon to destroy them for their wickedness in so doing; and then he "stirred up" the Medes and Persians to punish Babylon. Indeed, from the whole tenor of the scripture history, it is evident, that it is God's usual manner, to make use of the ambition, pride and cruelty of one nation, to punish the same wickedness in another; and when he has done so, to punish the instrument of his vengeance in the same manner. And this method of divine administration meets the approbation of the inhabitants of heaven. For when John saw in vision the third angel pour out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters, which turned them

to blood, denoting the terrible slaughter of the enemies of the church, by each other's hands, he says, Rev. 16. 5, 6. "And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus; for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy." And thus, reason, scripture, common sense, and the conscience of every man, agree in declaring, that men are guilty and deserving of punishment, notwithstanding they act under the decree of God, and do no more than what he causes them to do by his powerful agency.

There are some also, who make this objection against the doctrine supported in these discourses, who answer it themselves, and maintain the very principles against which they bring the objection. For they admit that God causes all the good actions of his creatures. They agree with us in saying, that God works in the saints to will and to do, of his good pleasure. But free agency is as necessary to holiness as it is to sin. A machine cannot be holy, any more than it can be sinful. If, then, God works in the saints to will and to do that which is right, and they are holy, he may work in the wicked to will and to do that which is wrong, and they be sinful. If God's agency does not destroy the agency of the saints, it does not destroy the agency of sinners. If,

while God works in the saints to will and do, they can *do* that which is praise worthy, and acceptable in the sight of God; then, while God works in sinners to will and to do, they can *do* that which is blame worthy, and deserving of punishment. And thus, many of those who make the objection destroy it themselves.

Objection 3. It is said, that the scriptures represent sinners as hardening their own hearts, fitting themselves for the day of wrath, and effecting their own destruction. But this doctrine represents God as hardening their hearts, and fitting them for destruction. And therefore, this doctrine is contrary to the scriptures.

Answer. It is true that the scriptures represent sinners as hardening their own hearts, destroying themselves, and the like. But this objection takes it for granted that the agency of God and the agency of the creature cannot both be employed about the same thing, when the doctrine supported in these discourses is, that they are both employed about the same thing. One passage of scripture declares that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and another passage declares that God hardened his heart. Both are true, and they are perfectly consistent with each other. For, it does not follow, because Pharaoh hardened his own heart, that therefore God did not harden it, nor because God hardened his heart, that therefore Pharaoh did not harden his own heart. The doctrine sup-

ported in these discourses is, that we *act, while acted upon*; that when God causes us to choose, *we choose*; that when God works in us to will and do, *we will and do*; that when God hardens our heart, we harden our own heart; that when God fits us for destruction, by causing us to do those things which will render us proper objects of his wrath, we fit ourselves for destruction by doing those things. The objection, therefore, is not made against our doctrine, but against something which is totally different from it.

SERMON V.

EPHESIANS I. 11.

Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

WE proceed in the discussion of objections.

Objection 4. It is said, that if this doctrine is true, and God decrees and causes whatever takes place, then men cannot possibly help doing as they do, in all cases. And so, if they are finally damned, they are damned for doing what they cannot help. And when God requires them to do otherwise than they do, he requires an impossibility; which is manifestly unjust and cruel.

Answer. It is granted that to punish men for doing what they cannot help, or to require of them an impossibility, would be manifestly unjust and cruel. But this God does not do. He requires no more of men than they are able to perform; and he punishes them only for doing those things which they could and ought to have abstained from doing. When we speak, in common language, of *ability* and *inability*, *can* and *cannot*,

possible and *impossible*, we always have reference to men's powers and faculties of body or mind, and not at all to their *inclinations*. If a man has all the powers and faculties of body and mind which are necessary to do a thing, we say he is *able* to do it, whether he is *willing* or not. His *ability* and his *willingness* are different things, perfectly distinct. A man may be *able* to perform a piece of work, which he has no heart to perform, and which he is totally *unwilling* to engage in. And again, a man may be perfectly *willing* to do that which is not in his power, that which is entirely beyond his strength. One man may be *able* to march to the field of battle, but totally *unwilling*. And another may be perfectly *willing* to march to the field of blood, but through bodily infirmity may be *unable*. *Ability* and *willingness* must both unite in the same person, before he will perform any thing, but they are perfectly distinct, and our willingness constitutes no part of our ability. It is true that *willingness* is sometimes styled *moral ability*; but it is evidently in a figurative and improper sense. According to the usual and proper meaning of the term, men are *able* to do every thing which they have bodily and mental strength sufficient to do, whether they are *willing* to exert that strength, and do the thing or not. Now, although God cannot justly require of men more than they are *able* to do, that is, more than they have bodily

and mental strength sufficient to do, if they were so disposed; yet he may, and does, justly require of them many things which they have no disposition to do, many things which they are totally *unwilling* to perform. And though men cannot be justly punished for not doing those things which they are unable to do, yet they may be justly punished for not doing those things which they are able, but are unwilling to do. Men are able to comply with the invitations of the gospel, that is, they have all the bodily and mental powers that are necessary to do it, and God may justly require them to do it, whether they are willing or not; and if they do not comply, he may justly punish them for their disobedience. And his making some willing and others unwilling, does not interfere with the ability of any. Those who are unwilling are just as able as those who are willing, and are as justly required to comply. To substantiate the objection, it must be made to appear, that God imposes some constraint upon men, so that they cannot do the things he requires, even though they are willing, and desirous of doing them. This is taken for granted in the objection. This is the real meaning of the phrase, doing what they cannot help. The meaning is, that they desire and endeavor to do otherwise, but have not the necessary bodily and mental strength. If they had, they should do otherwise. They would, but cannot. But the fact is directly the

reverse. They can, but will not. They have the necessary bodily and mental strength, but have no willingness. And this, God is not bound to give them. Should any say, that God cannot justly require of men any more than he gives them a willingness to do, as well as bodily and mental strength, this would abolish all law, and destroy the distinction between right and wrong. For if God cannot require of men any more than he makes them willing, as well as able, to do, then, since they always do what they have both strength and will to accomplish, he cannot justly require of them any more than they actually perform. And if they always do all that he requires, there is no such thing as sin in the world. It is right, therefore, for God to require of them all that they have powers and faculties sufficient to perform, all that they are able to do; and if they fail of complying through unwillingness, it is right that they should be punished. But men have all the powers and faculties necessary to comply with the invitations of the gospel, and all the commands of God, and want nothing but a willingness. They can comply, but will not. When, therefore, God punishes them for not complying, he punishes them, NOT for what they could not help, but solely for refusing to do what they could, but would not.

Objection 5. It is said, that if this doctrine is true, and all events are infallibly decreed, then it

is in vain for us to use means to accomplish any event. If it is decreed that the event shall come to pass, it will come to pass, whether the means are used or not. If it is decreed that we shall be saved, we shall be saved, whether we use the means of salvation or not; and if it is decreed that we shall be damned, we shall be damned, even though we should repent and believe the gospel.

Answer. To understand this objection fully, let us state it a little more at large. Its language is, if it is decreed that an event shall come to pass, it will come to pass, whether the means are used or not. If it is decreed that our life shall be prolonged, it will be prolonged, though we should take no food. If it is decreed that we shall reap an abundant harvest of the fruits of the earth, we shall certainly do so, though we never sow our seed, or cultivate our fields. If it is decreed that we shall be to-morrow in a distant place, we shall certainly be there, though we never stir a step from home. If it is decreed that we shall go to our respective homes this day, we shall certainly go, though we never rise from our seats. If it was "*determined*," as the scripture says, that the Lord Jesus should be put to death on the cross, it would certainly have taken place, though he had never come into the world. This is the language of the objection. And surely, every one must perceive, from the very language of the ob-

jection, that it is founded in a gross absurdity. It supposes that a thing can exist, and not exist, at the same time. It supposes that a whole can exist, without the existence of the parts of which it is composed. It supposes that a cause can exist, and operate, and produce its effect, and yet never exist at all. Nothing is *means*, which is not connected with the *end*, and necessary to bring it to pass. To say that the end can come to pass without the means, is to say that it can come to pass without that which is necessary to bring it to pass, which is a contradiction. To separate the end from the means, is to separate what are joined together in the very nature of things. If God has decreed the end, he has also decreed the means. That the end, although decreed, cannot come to pass without the means, is plainly taught in the scriptures. It was decreed that Paul, and all that were with him in the ship, should be saved, when the ship was wrecked. Acts 27. 22—25. It was told him before hand that no man's life should be lost. But the end's being decreed, did not render the means unnecessary. For when the sailors were about to flee out of the ship, and had let down the boat for that purpose, Paul says to the soldiers, verse 31, "Except these abide in the ship, *ye cannot be saved.*" Although it was decreed that the soldiers should be saved, yet the exertions of the sailors in the ship were necessary, as means to accomplish that

end. And had the means been wanting, the end "*could not*" have been attained, notwithstanding the decree. If, therefore, God has decreed the end, he has also decreed the means. If he has decreed that one man shall be saved, he has also decreed that he shall use the means of salvation. If he has decreed that another man shall be damned, he has also decreed that he shall use the means to be damned. To suppose that a man can be saved, without his using the means of salvation, is to make God a liar. The means of salvation are repentance for sin, and faith in Christ, which are always attended with the other christian graces. To say that a man can be saved without repentance, is to contradict the declaration of God, which is, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." To say that a man can be saved without faith in Christ, is to say, that "he that believeth *not* shall be saved," when God hath said, "He that believeth *not* shall be damned." Further, when any say, that if God has already unalterably decreed their eternal state, then they have no inducement to break off their sins and lead a holy life, they betray, by this objection, the wickedness of their hearts. They discover that they love sin, and are unwilling to renounce it, that they hate holiness, and are unwilling to practise it; and if their eternal happiness^s is secure, they choose to continue in sin, and are determined to do so. Such may be certain that they

are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity; that they are using the means to be damned, and if mercy prevent not, they will be damned. Some say, that if they could believe this doctrine, they never would make any exertions to secure the salvation of their souls. But when they say this, besides betraying their love of sin, they are chargeable with the grossest absurdity. For, it is the same as to say, that if God has decreed that their repenting and believing the gospel shall secure the salvation of their souls, they never will repent and believe the gospel. The doctrine, however, which is supported in these discourses, is so far from discouraging the use of means, that all the encouragement we have to use means is derived from it. It is the disbelief of this doctrine, that discourages the use of means. If God has not, by his decrees, established a connection between means and ends, where is the encouragement to use means? There is none. If there is no such connection, the end is no more likely to come to pass with means, than it is without them. If God has established no connection between means and ends, the man who ploughs his field and sows his seed, is no more likely to reap a harvest, than he who does neither. If God has established no connection between means and ends, he that remains perfectly inactive is as likely to accomplish all his desires, as he who exerts himself with the greatest diligence. And who,

on this supposition, would make any exertions? Who would use any means, if he did not suppose there was some connection between them and the end he had in view? To deny the decrees of God, then, which form this connection, is to destroy effectually all encouragement to the use of means. But if God, by his decrees, has established a connection, and the end is more likely to be attained by means than without them, then there is encouragement to use means. And the stronger this connection is, the greater is the encouragement. If this connection is infallible, and the end certainly follows from the means, then there is the same inducement to use means that there is to obtain the end. If we have reason to conclude God has decreed that our taking food shall prolong our lives, we shall have as strong inducement to take food, as we have to prolong our lives. If we have reason to conclude God has decreed that our repenting and believing the gospel shall secure the salvation of our souls, we shall have the same inducement to repent and believe the gospel, that we have to secure the salvation of our souls. And if we have reason to believe that God has decreed both the means and the end, and established a firm connection between them, then, if we find ourselves disposed to use the means, we may depend with certainty that the end will follow, and shall have all the encouragement possible to proceed

in the use of them with diligence and alacrity.

Objection 6. It is said, that this doctrine makes God the author of sin; and to make God the author of sin, is such dreadful blasphemy, that it ought not to be thought, much less to be openly taught and defended.

Answer. This has been thought to be an objection of great force. It is apprehended, however, that its force consists merely in its *sound*. It is believed that when the meaning of the objection can be ascertained, and ideas are attended to, instead of sounds, the objection will vanish. What, then, is the meaning of the objection? Does it mean that the doctrine supported in these discourses makes God the *actor* of sin? Or does it mean, that it makes God employ his agency in the production of sinful actions, in such a manner as he ought not to employ it? Or does it mean, that it makes God employ his agency in the production of effects, which are, on the whole, undesirable, and not for the general good? If the objection means any of these, it is believed that it does not lie against the doctrine we have supported. And if it does not mean any of these, it is difficult to conceive what it can mean, to be an objection in the mind of any one.

When the objector says, then, that this doctrine makes God the author of sin, does he mean that it makes God the actor of sin? The term author often conveys the idea of doing, performing, or

acting; as we sometimes say, such a man was the author of a crime, when we mean, he was the actor, the doer, the perpetrator of it. To say that God is the author of sin, in this sense, would, indeed, be blasphemy. It would be saying that God is a sinner. But the doctrine supported in these discourses does not make God the author of sin in this sense. In this sense of the term author, every one is the author of his own sin. When God works in us to will and do any thing, we are the doers of that thing. When God causes us to choose, it is we that choose. When God causes us to walk, it is we that walk. When God "turned the heart" of the Egyptians "to hate his people," it was the Egyptians, and not God, that hated his people. In like manner, if he causes men to commit a sin, they are the committers, the doers, the perpetrators, of that sin, and not God. If this is what the objector means by the phrase, author of sin, God is not the author of sin, in any such sense, and the doctrine supported in these discourses does not make him so.

Does the objector, then, by the term author mean nothing more than the cause, and suppose that God cannot cause the sinful actions of men, without bringing a reproach upon his character? If this is true, it must be because he cannot cause the sinful actions of men without exercising an improper agency, or because he cannot be a cause of the sinful actions of men without having sin in

himself, or because he cannot cause the sinful actions of men without causing the existence of something which had better be kept out of existence.

Is it true, then, that God cannot cause the sinful actions of men, without exercising an improper agency, and doing something which brings a reproach upon his character? This has been sometimes thought, and in support of it, it may be said, that it would evidently be wrong in us to use our influence to make any one sin, and that Satan is chargeable with guilt in tempting us to sin, and therefore, that it must be wrong in God to cause us to commit sin. It is true that it is wrong in us, and in Satan, to use our influence to make others sin; but it does not follow that it is therefore wrong in God to do so. We are chargeable with guilt for influencing others to commit sin, for two reasons. We do what we have no right to do, and we do it with a wicked intention. But God is not chargeable with guilt in causing us to commit sin, because he has a right to govern us, and because he does it with a good intention. God is our maker, and has, therefore, a right to dispose of us, as he sees fit. He is the governor of the universe, and has a right to make use of any of his creatures as instruments in administering that government. If he sees that some wise and good purpose will be effected by the instrumentality of some sin, which good cannot other-

wise be attained, but which will be sufficient to overbalance the evil of that sin, it is right for him, as governor of the universe, to cause the commission of that sin, although it would not be right for any of the creatures to do so, because the government of the universe is not committed to their hands. If God saw that it was wisest and best that his Son should be betrayed, mocked, condemned, and crucified; if he saw that the sum of good in the universe would be greatly increased by the taking place of these events, it was right for him to cause Judas, and Herod, and Pilate, and the gentiles and people of Israel, "to do whatsoever his hand and his counsel determined before to be done." If he saw that it was wisest and best that the kings of the earth should "agree and give their kingdom unto the beast," it was right for him to "put in their hearts" to do so.

Is it true, then, that God cannot be a cause of the sinful actions of men, without having sin in himself? This has been sometimes said, and in support of it, it has been urged, that there can be nothing in the effect which is not in the cause. It has been said, that like produces like; that it is impossible for a cause to produce an effect of a nature diametrically opposite to its own. It is true that every effect must have a cause which is adequate to its production; but it by no means follows, that the effect and the cause must be of the same nature. God has produced matter, but

it does not follow that God is a material being. God has created toads and serpents, with all their poisonous qualities, but it does not follow that there is in God any thing like them. God has created a lake of fire and brimstone, for the punishment of the wicked, but it does not follow that there is in God any thing of a similar nature. In like manner, although it should be said, that God produces sin, it would not follow that there was any thing like it in him. Indeed, those who say that there can be nothing in the effect which is not in the cause, are themselves the persons who make God a sinful being. For if sin cannot be the effect of any but a sinful cause, there can be no time when it began to exist. For, to say that sin began to exist, and yet it had a sinful cause, is to say, that there was sin before the first sin; since the cause is before the effect. But if it never began to exist, it has existed from eternity; and since there is no eternal being but God, in which it could exist, this principle makes God an eternal sinner. But if sin began to exist, there was no sin in its cause. There was no sin in the cause of the first sin. God may, therefore, be the efficient or producing cause of the sinful actions of men, without implying that there is any sin in him.

Does the force of the objection, then, consist in this, that the doctrine supported in these discourses makes God employ his agency in causing

the existence of something which had better be kept out of existence? It would indeed be a reproach to the divine character, if God employed his agency in causing, or if he did not use it in preventing, the existence of any thing by which the highest interest of the universe would suffer. But he does not cause nor permit any thing to take place contrary to the general good. And till it can be proved, as it never can, that the great interests of the universe suffer by the sins which take place, there is no force in this objection. But, as it has been proved, in the first of these discourses, that nothing takes place but what is, on the whole, for the best, nothing but what tends in some way to promote the highest happiness of the universe, for God to cause these things is not a matter of reproach, but of praise.

Thus, it appears, that the doctrine supported in these discourses does not make God the *actor* of sin; it does not make him exercise any agency in producing the sinful actions of men, but what is perfectly proper and suitable for him, as governor of the universe; it does not make it necessary to suppose that there is any sin in him, or any imperfection in his nature; nor does it make him exercise an agency in the production of any events, but such as are, on the whole, wisest and best. And consequently, this doctrine does not make God the author of sin, in any sense which is in the least degree derogatory to the divine

character, or which brings the slightest reproach upon his name.

NOTE.

To remove the difficulty of God's being the cause of sin, it has been said, that sin is a mere *want of holiness*. And that since it is a mere negative thing, it cannot have any positive cause. And that although God causes our actions, he does not cause the *sinfulness* of them. But, it is apprehended, that there can be really no foundation for this distinction; and if there were, it is not seen that any advantage is gained by it. How can the action of *hating* God, be separated from the *sin* of it, so as to have a separate cause? Can any thing be added to, or taken from *hatred* of God, so as to render it a holy exercise? Can *hatred* of God be any thing but *sin*? And if not, how can it be considered a mere negative thing, a non-entity, a *nothing*? Is not *hatred* as really a positive exercise, as *love* is? How can the action of *loving sin* be abstracted from its moral qualities, so as to become harmless and innocent? Is not *loving sin*, in itself a *sin*? And is it not a positive thing, as really as *loving God* is a positive thing? How can these actions be produced, without producing sin? But if this distinction were well founded, what advantage would be gained by it? If God causes all our actions, and also causes the goodness of good beings, which is admitted, that being a positive thing, then, when he causes one to act, whom he has not made good, he causes him to *act wickedly*. And if he, by his agency, causes one to act wickedly, who, without that agency, would not act at all, why is not this liable to all the objections which can be brought against our doctrine, on the supposition that sin is a positive thing, and produced by divine power?

SERMON VI.

EPHESIANS I. 11.

Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

WE proceed in the discussion of objections.

Objection 7. It is said, that God, in scripture, represents sin as contrary to his will, and forbids it under the penalty of his severest indignation; but this doctrine represents sin as taking place agreeably to his will; and if God represents sin as contrary to his will, and at the same time teaches this doctrine, he contradicts himself. It is said, that God, in scripture, expresses the greatest abhorrence of sin; but that, if he has decreed the existence of sin, and employs his own agency in causing it to take place, then he must be well pleased with sin; and therefore, he expresses an abhorrence which he does not feel, and acts a deceitful part. It is said, that God, in scripture, says, that he wills not the death of the sinner; but that if this doctrine is true, he does will his death. And if he punishes his creatures for doing

what he caused them to do, then he must delight in their misery: which represents God as a most wicked, false, cruel, and unfeeling tyrant.

Answer. Before we proceed directly to the consideration of this objection, let a few things be premised. First, let it be observed, that in order to make out a contradiction in the declarations of any one, we must be certain that the words, which are supposed to contradict each other, are used, in both instances, in the same sense. For example, the scripture says, in one place, "Answer a fool according to his folly," and in another place, "Answer not a fool according to his folly." Now, to make out a contradiction here, we must be certain that the words are used in both places in the same sense; for if they are used in different senses, the two passages may be perfectly consistent. Again, let it be observed, that an event may, at one time, be considered by itself alone, and spoken of in that point of view, without taking into consideration any of its connections and consequences; and it may, at another time, be considered, and spoken of, with all its connections, consequences, relations, and dependencies. When spoken of in the former point of view, it is said to be spoken of as it is in itself considered; and when spoken of in the latter point of view, it is said to be spoken of as it is upon the whole, all things considered. Once more, let it be observed, that a thing may sometimes be chosen for its own sake, without any

reference to any other thing; and this is what is called being desirable in itself. As, for example, we choose happiness for its own sake, because it is desirable in itself. And again, a thing which is not desirable in itself, and which never could be chosen for its own sake, may be chosen for the sake of some other thing with which it is connected, and which may thereby be attained; and this is called being desirable on the whole. For instance, we may choose to suffer a small temporary evil, for the sake of some great and lasting good, which may thereby be attained. We may choose to suffer the pain of cutting off one of our limbs, which is very undesirable in itself, for the sake of preserving our whole body from destruction. A wise and good parent may choose to inflict pain upon his undutiful child, not for its own sake, not because he delights in seeing his child suffer, for that is very undesirable in itself, but he chooses it for the sake of the child's good, or for the good of the rest of his family, to deter them from the like disobedience. God chose that his Son should die, not for its own sake, he had no pleasure in the sufferings of his Son, in themselves considered, but he chose it for the sake of the salvation of sinners; he chose it, because, upon the whole, considering the amazing worth of souls, and the great glory that will redound to his name from saving sinners, considering how much his law would be honored, and how clearly

his hatred of sin would appear in the cross of Christ, all things being considered, he chose the death of his Son, as upon the whole a desirable event, though in itself considered nothing could be more undesirable. He chooses often to afflict his children in this world, not for its own sake, he does not delight in their sufferings, in themselves considered; but he does it for their good, he does it because all things considered it is desirable, and will prepare them for a higher degree of happiness in heaven than they could otherwise enjoy. It must be evident that this distinction is well founded. For if it is not, if God gave up his Son to die, and "put him to grief," because he took pleasure in his sufferings, considered in themselves, if he afflicts his children in this world because he delights in their pain, he must be a malevolent being. But this is the character of Satan. Satan torments others because he delights in their misery in itself considered. This is pure malice, and cannot be ascribed to God. But if this distinction is well founded, as it certainly is, the way is prepared to remove the objection under consideration.

For, with respect to the same event, we may be said without any contradiction, to will it, and not will it at the same time. It would indeed be a contradiction if we used the word *will* both times in the same sense, and with the same extent of signification; but we do not. We will it, in one

sense, while, in another sense, we do not will it. We will it, in itself considered, while we do not will it, on the whole; or else we will it on the whole, while we do not will it in itself considered. We do not will the loss of one of our limbs, in itself considered, as in the case supposed above, while we do will its loss, on the whole, all things considered. The parent wills not the pain of his child, in itself considered, while he does will his pain on the whole, for the sake of its consequences. In like manner, God may be said to will a thing, and not will it, at the same time; that is, he does it in different senses. He willed not the death of his Son, in itself considered, while at the same time, all things considered, he did will his death. He wills not the affliction of his people, in itself considered; he takes no delight in their pain; while, at the same time, he does will their affliction, on the whole, all things considered, and brings it upon them.

Keeping this distinction in view, God may be said to will sin, and not will it, at the same time; but in different senses. That is, he does not will it, in itself considered; it is in itself that abominable thing which his soul hateth. But at the same time, when he sees that he can make a particular sin the occasion or means of some great good, which could not otherwise be accomplished, then he wills it to take place for the sake of that great good. It was in itself very undesirable that man

should fall, and that sin should enter into the world; and consequently, God must, in itself considered, have desired or willed that it should not take place. But when he considered that without this he could never display his wonderful mercy and grace in saving fallen man, which will fill all heaven with admiration and praise, ages without end, for the sake of this great good, he willed that man should fall. Or, if it should be said that God could not prevent man from sinning without destroying his moral agency, and that this was the reason he did not prevent it; then it follows, that although in itself considered God willed that man should not sin, yet on the whole, rather than destroy his moral agency, he willed that man should sin. The sin of the betrayers and murderers of our Lord was in itself very undesirable, and so, in itself considered, God could not have willed it. But when he considered that without this no atonement could be made, and no sinner pardoned, for the scripture says, Hebrews 9. 22. "Without shedding of blood, is no remission;" when he considered that without this, all our fallen race must perish for ever, for the sake of the great good to be accomplished by it, he willed that men should betray and murder his Son. Thus, we see how God can be said, without any contradiction, to will sin and not will it, at the same time. He does it in different senses. He never wills it for its own sake, but for the sake of

some great good which he will bring out of it. And that God wills sin, in this sense, does not imply that he feels any approbation towards sin in its own nature, or that he looks upon it with the least complacency, any more than it implies that we love pain, when we choose to endure it for the sake of some good. Neither does it imply that God is insincere in expressing the greatest abhorrence of sin. In itself, it is most odious and undesirable; and when God expresses an abhorrence of it, he expresses what he really feels. He hates it with all his heart. But this is no more inconsistent with his willing that it should take place, when he sees that some good can be attained by it, that will overbalance the evil, than it is inconsistent for us to do every day those things which are undesirable in themselves, for the sake of some good which we expect to accomplish by so doing.

This distinction lays the foundation for another distinction, which must be made in order to reconcile the scripture with itself, that of God's will of command, and will of decree. God has given us his will of command, as the rule of our conduct. Whatever is right in its own nature, he has commanded. Whatever is wrong in its own nature, he has forbidden. It is right in its own nature, and desirable for its own sake, that all intelligent creatures should love God with all their hearts, and their fellow-creatures as themselves. This,

therefore, he has commanded. And all those things, in our external conduct, which are suitable expressions of this love, he has also commanded. But, not to exercise this love, or to indulge any affection which is inconsistent with it, is wrong in its own nature; it is in itself a very undesirable and wicked thing; and therefore, God has forbidden it. It is also right in its own nature, and desirable for its own sake, that God should exercise the same disinterested, universal, and impartial benevolence, which he requires of his creatures. And he does exercise it. But our capacities and our circumstances are so different from his, that what would be a suitable expression of that benevolence in God, would not be so in us. It is incumbent on all moral beings, to exercise the same benevolent affection, to be of the same holy temper. But their capacities and circumstances, their situations and relations, are so various, that what would be a suitable expression of that holy temper in one, would not be in another. What might be suitable for the father of a family to do, and would be in him an expression of a right temper, might be very unsuitable for a child in that family to do, and might be in him an expression of a very different temper. The same external action, which would, in a magistrate, be an expression of a right disposition, might, in a private citizen, be an evidence of a very wicked disposition. God has given us his

revealed will, in which he has pointed out what things are, in us, proper expressions of a holy heart, and has commanded us to do those things, and forbidden the contrary. But for himself, being placed in different circumstances, he has marked out, in his own mind, a different course of conduct, as in him a proper expression of the same holy heart. Being himself at the head of the universe, and possessing infinite power, and infinite wisdom, it is, in him, an expression of holy benevolence, to decree and cause those things to take place, which are upon the whole wisest and best. If he did not decree and cause those things to take place, which are, upon the whole, wisest and best, it would be an evidence of a want of goodness. God can discern what the greatest good of the universe requires, and bring it to pass. This, therefore, is the proper rule of his conduct; and it is suitable for him to decree and cause those things, by which this object will be best promoted. But we are placed in different circumstances, and cannot make this our rule of conduct, because we are not able to see before hand what will be, on the whole, for the greatest good of the universe. For us, therefore, to leave our proper sphere, and attempt to do those things which are God's peculiar prerogative, would be the height of arrogance and impiety. No; what is right in itself, God's will of command, must be our rule of conduct; for the moment we depart from this rule, we

manifest a wicked disposition; and we must leave it to God, to make what is best on the whole, and his will of decree, his rule of conduct. It does not, therefore, imply any contradiction in God, for him to command us to do what is right in itself, while he himself determines that he will do what is best on the whole. It is wrong in itself, that men should commit murder; and for them to do it, is an expression of a wicked disposition; and therefore, God has forbidden it. But, it was best on the whole, that his Son should be murdered by wicked men, best that in that way an atonement should be made for sin. Therefore, it was proper for God to decree and cause that his Son should be "taken, and by wicked hands be crucified and slain;" (Acts 2. 23.) and his doing so, is in him an expression of a holy disposition. It is his will of command, "Thou shalt not kill," but it was his will of decree, his "determinate counsel," that they should put his Son to death. It is his will of command, that men should not commit adultery, and that they should not dishonor their parents; but it was his will of decree, that Absalom should do both, for he says to David, II Samuel 12. 11. "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives, in the sight of this sun." This was fulfilled in the wicked conduct of Absalom, as re-

corded in the following chapters. It was God's will of command, that Pharaoh should let his people go; but it was his will of decree, that Pharaoh should refuse to let them go, for he says to Moses, Exodus 4. 21. "I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go." It is his will of command, that men should not lie; but it was his will of decree, that the prophets of Ahab should lie to him, for the prophet of the Lord says, I Kings 22. 23. "The Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets." And the scriptures use the word *will* in both of these senses. Mark 3. 35. "For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." There it is will of command. I Peter 3. 17. "It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." Here it is will of decree; for God has not commanded that men should suffer for well doing, though it is sometimes his decree that they should. Examples of this kind may be multiplied, but these are sufficient to show, that this distinction is clearly warranted by scripture, and indeed absolutely necessary, to reconcile the scripture with itself. When it is said, therefore, that sin is contrary to God's will, and yet takes place agreeably to his will, there is no contradiction, if it is understood according to the sentiments here advanced. Sin is always contrary to God's will of command, it is always undesirable in itself, it

is always odious in its own nature, and in that sense, to wit, in itself considered, he never wills it; while, at the same time, all the sin which does take place, is, on the whole, for the best, and in that sense, always takes place according to the dictates of infinite wisdom and goodness.

The objection further supposes, that our doctrine makes God will the death of the sinner, in such a sense as to contradict his own declaration, and delight in his misery, like a cruel tyrant. The distinction, however, laid down in our premises, removes this part of the objection also. For although the infinite goodness of God makes him desire the good of every creature he has made, for its own sake, yet it makes him desire the good of the whole, taken collectively, more than of any part. And if he sees that the greatest good of the whole, requires that the good of a part should be given up, and that they should suffer eternal misery, his infinite goodness makes him desire that it should be done. When he punishes the devils according to their deserts, he does not do it because he has any delight in their pain. In itself considered, he desires their happiness very strongly. But considering the honor of his government, considering how much the great interests of the universe would suffer, if they should go unpunished—upon the whole, all things considered, his goodness prompts him to punish them according to their deserts, and sentence them to

the blackness of darkness forever. So, when he punishes wicked men, whether in this world or the next, he does not do it because he delights in their pain. He desires their happiness, in itself considered, very strongly. But he desires the good of the universe much more; and when that good requires, he inflicts upon the wicked the punishment they deserve. In itself considered he willed not the punishment of Ephraim; and he expresses his feelings in the strongest manner. Hosea 11. 8. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." But, at the same time, he did will his punishment, on the whole, all things considered, and gave him up to suffer accordingly. He wills not the death of sinners, even the most obstinate and incorrigible, in itself considered; it is very undesirable in itself; but yet he does will their death, all things considered, and pronounces upon them the sentence, "depart ye cursed." He is not "willing that any should perish," in itself considered, "but that all should come to repentance," II Peter 3. 9; it is, in itself, very desirable, that all should repent and be saved; and yet, it is said of some, II Thess. 2. 11, 12. "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned." In these, and similar pas-

sages, God does not contradict himself; but he does really, in itself considered, desire the salvation of all men; while, on the whole, all things considered, he wills that some should perish. And when he “hardens” and “blinds” some, and “sends them strong delusion, that they might be damned,” and causes them to do those things which will fit them for destruction, he does it for wise and benevolent reasons, and not because he has any delight in seeing their torments or hearing their groans.

Objection 8. It is said that, whoever does the will of God, does right, and shall be accepted. But that, if God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass, then, whatsoever men do, they do the will of God. Therefore, all men do the will of God, and will be accepted with him. Besides, it is said, God has good and wise purposes to be accomplished by all the sins which take place, they are all conducive to the promotion of the greatest good of the universe, they are not a real injury, but a real benefit to God’s kingdom; and therefore, they do not deserve a punishment, but a reward; and the robber, the murderer, and the adulterer, will receive a reward for what they have done, as well as the most diligent and faithful christian.

Answer. This objection is nearly connected with the preceding one; and keeping in mind what has been said in answer to that, this can be

answered in few words. The first part of the objection contains the following sophism—Whoever does the will of God, will be accepted. But all men do the will of God, if they act as he has decreed. Therefore, all men will be accepted. This is like the following sophism of the schools. A church is a building of stone. But a religious assembly is a church. Therefore, a religious assembly is a building of stone. Or the following—That which is sold in the shambles is eaten for dinner. But raw meat is sold in the shambles. Therefore, raw meat is eaten for dinner. The sophistry of all these arguments, consists in the words being used, in the different propositions, in different senses. To make the argument good, and the conclusion correct, the words must be used, each time, precisely in the same sense. It is true, that whoever acts agreeably to God's will of command, does right, and will be accepted. But it does not follow that all men will be accepted, unless it can be shown that all men act agreeably to God's will, taken in the same sense. If they do act agreeably to God's will of decree, that is a very different thing, and God has nowhere promised to accept of such, or expressed the least approbation of them on that account.

But it is said, they promote the good of the universe, as really as the saints do; and therefore, that they deserve a reward, and will receive it, if God is just. *Answer.* God is just, and will treat

them according to their deserts. But their desert of reward and punishment does not depend upon what they *effect*, but upon what they *intend*. This is the dictate of common sense. We never conclude that a man is praise or blame worthy, till we inquire into his *design*. We never think a man is entitled to a reward, for having undesignedly produced an effect, when he did his utmost to effect the contrary. One man stabs another with intent to kill him. Here is murder in his heart. By mistake, however, he does not effect his purpose, but only opens an abscess, and cures his intended victim of a disease which would otherwise have proved mortal. He saves the life he intends to destroy. He effects good, while he intends evil. But is he, therefore, praise worthy, and entitled to a reward? No one will suppose it. The wicked intend evil. Their design is an improper design. Their spirit is a bad spirit. And if God does make their wickedness the means of promoting the greatest good of the universe, they intend no such thing. Their hearts are wrong. They are enemies to God, and enemies to his kingdom. They are guilty of treason against the universe; and though they should be unsuccessful, they have done their worst; and they know they deserve an exemplary punishment, and they may look for it with certainty at the hands of a just and holy God.

Objection 9. It is said, that if this doctrine is

true, and God decrees and causes whatsoever comes to pass, then he decrees and causes that some should reject the offers of salvation. But that if he decrees that they shall reject the offers of salvation, and causes them to reject those offers, he cannot be sincere in making those offers to them. He binds the prisoner fast in chains, and then opens the door, and bids him come out, which is but mocking his misery.

Answer. To make out the charge of insincerity against God, it must be made to appear that he refuses to give salvation to those who are willing to accept it, according to his offer. If he offers it on conditions which are in the power of every one, and gives it to all who comply with those conditions, and withholds it from none but those who refuse to comply, there is no foundation for the charge of insincerity. It would indeed be an evidence of insincerity, to bind a prisoner fast in chains, and then invite him to come out of his prison. But this supposes that the prisoner is willing to come out, but cannot. This case is not at all like that of the sinner. The sinner can, but will not. If the prisoner had his chains knocked off, and the doors set open, he might be sincerely invited to come out. What Christ has done, has opened the prison doors, and knocked off the chains. The sinner may come out, if he will. Every obstacle is removed. Whoever accepts the offered mercy, receives the

benefit of it. And those who will not accept it, have no right to conclude that God is not sincere in making them the offer.

But it is said again, that, according to the doctrine supported in these discourses, God hardens the sinner's heart, and causes him to refuse the offered mercy. He cannot, therefore, desire he should accept it. And if he does not desire he should accept it, he cannot be sincere when he expresses such a desire, as he evidently does, in his offers of life, his warnings, threatenings, invitations, exhortations, and commands to choose life. *Answer.* When God, by his invitations, commands, &c., represents himself as desiring the salvation of the sinner, he must either desire his salvation on the whole, all things considered, because it is best on the whole, or only desire his salvation in itself considered, because it is desirable for its own sake. Is it, then, best on the whole, that every sinner should be saved? and does God, taking into view all the consequences, upon the whole, desire the salvation of every sinner? and is this the desire which is expressed in the offers of life? No; this cannot be the case. For, if God did, on the whole, desire the salvation of every sinner, he would save every sinner. It is God that saves sinners, and he is as able to save all, as he is to save a part. If he did, on the whole, desire that every sinner should comply with the offers of salvation, he would change

their hearts, and cause them to comply. It is he that takes away the stony heart, and gives a new heart; and he is able to do it in every instance, if he chooses. If he does not do it, then, in any instance, it is because he does not, on the whole, choose to do it, in that instance; that is, he does not, on the whole, choose that that sinner should be saved. But, should any say that God cannot change the sinner's heart, and make him "willing in the day of his power," and "cause him to walk in his statutes," though he does, on the whole, desire to do it; we may ask them, if God does, on the whole, desire the salvation of every sinner, why does he not do all that he can, to save them? If he cannot give them a new heart, and make them willing to comply with the terms of the gospel, why does he not use with them all the means that he can? He could raise up more preachers, he could pour out his spirit, he could awaken the careless and secure, he could place before every sinner a lively view of the glories of heaven and the torments of the damned, he could send his gospel to all nations, he could furnish his preachers with all those miraculous gifts, which were so instrumental of spreading the gospel at first, he could do a thousand things, which he does not do, to promote the salvation of all men. It is evident, then, that he does not, on the whole, desire the salvation of all men; but chooses, for some wise reasons, that a part should

perish; and, according to his own word, "sends them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they might be damned." Since, therefore, God does not, on the whole, desire the salvation of all men, the offers of life, which are made to all, do not express a desire, on the whole, for the salvation of all. But God does desire the salvation of all men, in itself considered. He views it, as in itself, exceedingly desirable. And the offers of life, the invitations, warnings, threatenings, expostulations, and commands, express this desire. And they express what God sincerely feels. But they do not express any other desire, and God does not feel any other desire for the salvation of those he does not save. The salvation of a particular sinner may be exceedingly desirable in itself, while, on the whole, for some wise reason, it may be best he should not be saved. God, therefore, may, without any inconsistency, sincerely desire his salvation, in itself considered, while, on the whole, all things considered, he desires his destruction. He may, therefore, express his desire for his salvation, in itself considered, by offering him life, and exhorting him to choose it, and be very sincere in it; while, at the same time, since his damnation is best on the whole, he may decree his damnation, and harden his heart, and "send him strong delusion, that he might be damned."

SERMON VII.

EPHESIANS I. 11.

Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

WE proceed in the discussion of objections.

Objection 10. It is said, that if this doctrine is true, and all the sin that takes place is for the best, then sin is a good thing, and the more we have of it the better. And therefore, that the language of this doctrine is, "let us do evil that good may come;" for if we believe this doctrine we should not endeavor to prevent sin, but rather encourage it by all the means in our power.

Answer. The same objection was made against this doctrine, in the days of the apostle. When he taught, Rom. 3. 7. that "the truth of God hath more abounded, through our lie, unto his glory;" that is, that our wickedness has been the occasion of manifesting the divine perfections, in a more glorious manner than they could otherwise have been manifested; he was "slanderosly reported" and affirmed to say, "let us do evil, that good

may come." But those who drew this conclusion from the doctrine, so evidently and so wickedly perverted it, that he says, their "damnation is just." It does not follow, because the sin which does take place, is, on the whole, for the best, all things being considered, that therefore, it is good in its own nature. It is best, on the whole, that the people of God should suffer many trials in this life, from pain, sickness, and death, as it will prepare them for a higher degree of holiness and happiness in heaven; but it does not follow, that pain, sickness, and death are good things in their own nature, or desirable for their own sake. Neither does it follow, because all the sin which does take place is for the best, that the more there is of it the better. It does not follow, because it is best to have some pain, sickness, and death, that the more we have of them the better. It is best, in the whole compass of the year, to have some bitter cold weather; but it does not follow, that the more there is of it the better. The doctrine of these discourses is, that whatever takes place is for the best; that the present system, just as it is, is the best possible system. But to say, that because the sin which does take place is for the best, it would be better to have more, is the same as to say, that because the present system is the best, a different system would be better, which is absurd. And to say, that if this doctrine is true, we should encourage sin, instead of opposing it,

is not a correct conclusion, for several reasons. In the first place, if we did not oppose it as much as we do, there would be more of it than there is now; and agreeably to our doctrine, any change, either way, would make the system worse. We must oppose it, therefore, just as much as we do, in order that there may not be too much. In the second place, we cannot know before hand, what particular sins will be for the best, because we cannot, as God does, take a view of the whole ground, and see things in all their connections and consequences; and consequently, we could not know what sins to oppose, and what to encourage, if it could be right for us to encourage any. In the third place, it is the peculiar prerogative of God to make what is best on the whole his rule of conduct, and we have no right to attempt to make it ours. If we could know before hand, that a particular sin would be for the best, as we cannot, unless God informs us, still, God has given us no right to commit it ourselves, or to use our influence to have others commit it. It was known before hand that Judas should betray Christ, for our Lord had given the information. But this did not give Judas a right to betray him; nor did it give the other disciples a right to encourage him in doing so. It was known before hand that Peter should deny his master, for our Lord had told him. But this did not give him a right to do so. It was known

beforehand that Christ should be unjustly condemned, mocked, scourged, and crucified; for it was all foretold by the prophets, and by Christ himself. But this did not give men a right to perpetrate any of this wickedness. Many of the wicked deeds of men are foretold in the scriptures. And we know, that if God did not see it best on the whole that they should take place, he would prevent them. But the knowledge of all this, does not give any man a right to perpetrate this wickedness, or to encourage it. The administration of the divine government is not committed to our hands. And for us to attempt to exercise it, would be an expression of an arrogant and wicked disposition. And finally, it is impossible that we should commit sin, with a view to do good. To make the good of the universe our object, is to exercise a right disposition; but to commit sin, is to exercise a wrong disposition. And to exercise a wrong disposition with a right disposition, is a contradiction. If that external action, which would be the usual expression of a wicked disposition, should be performed out of obedience to God, and with a view to his glory and the good of the universe, it would not be a sinful action. If the good of the universe, therefore, requires that a particular sin should be committed, the act must not only be forbidden, but it must be performed with a wicked disposition. If it was best on the whole that the Lord Jesus should be murdered, it

was impossible that this should be done with a view to the glory of God. For if his life was taken with any other disposition than a malicious one, it would not have been murder. And every one knows that a malicious disposition, and a disposition that seeks the glory of God, are directly opposite to each other. It is impossible, therefore, for a person really and sincerely to "do evil, that good may come," however some may make this their pretence. But it is our duty to obey God, to do what is right in itself, that is, love God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves, and to express this holy temper in all those ways that he has pointed out in his holy word. It is our duty to avoid and oppose whatever God has forbidden, whatever is wrong in itself, and leave it to God to govern the universe as he sees best on the whole, and to make what is best on the whole, the rule of his conduct.

Objection 11. It is said, that if this doctrine is true, and God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass, then God has decreed that the saints should continue to fall into some sins, from time to time. He has not seen fit that they should be completely sanctified till death. But it is the duty of all to submit to God's will, to acquiesce in whatever he ordains, to choose whatever God chooses. It is the duty of the saints, therefore, to be willing not to be entirely freed from sin, till death; it is their duty to be willing to fall into some sins, from time

to time, since they know it is God's will that they should. But it is thought, that being willing to sin, is actually sinning already. And consequently, that it can never be right to be willing to sin. And therefore, that it cannot be God's will that we should sin; and that it cannot be true that God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass.

Answer. The great difficulty in this objection seems to be this, that to be willing to sin, is actually sinning already. If this difficulty can be removed, and it can be shown that it is possible to be willing to sin, in a sense which is not actually committing sin, the objection will be answered. If it can be shown that we can have any kind of willingness to do this, which is not a sinful willingness; if it can be shown that we can will sin in ourselves, in any sense which does not imply a love of sin, then it will appear that we can will sin in a good sense, in a sense perfectly consistent with our duty, and an entire love to God. Let us see, then, whether this can be done.

It will be necessary, here, to bear in mind some things which have been said in answer to former objections. It was seen, in the answer to a former objection, that we may will a thing, and not will it, at the same time, in different senses. It was seen, that a thing may be undesirable in itself, and so, never could be chosen for its own sake, while, at the same time, it may be desirable for the sake of some other thing connected with it,

and so, might be chosen on the whole. The humane judge wills not the death of the criminal for its own sake. In itself considered, he desires his life. But, at the same time, he does will his death, on the whole, for the public good, and pronounces the sentence upon him. In the same manner, God never can will sin for its own sake. It is, in itself, that abominable thing which he hates. But, at the same time, when he sees that some great good can be accomplished by it, of sufficient importance to overbalance the evil, which good could not otherwise be accomplished; when he sees that a particular sin will be, on the whole, for the best, he wills it, he chooses it should take place, and brings it to pass. No sin takes place, but what God is, in this sense, willing should take place. This willingness in God, is not a sinful willingness, but the contrary. It does not imply in it any love of sin, but is perfectly consistent with the greatest abhorrence of sin, considered as it is in its own nature. In like manner, when God has made it known to the angels in heaven, that a particular sin will be for the best, they can be willing it should take place, in the same sense that God is; and this willingness does not imply in them any love of sin, but is perfectly consistent with their viewing it in its own nature with the greatest abhorrence. In like manner, when God has made known to holy men upon earth, that some sins will be for the

best, they can be willing that they should take place, in the same sense that God is. And it is not necessary to suppose that this willingness in them is sinful, any more than that the same kind of willingness in God is sinful. God does not will sin, in itself considered; neither do they. God does not look upon any sin, but with abhorrence; neither do they. But God chooses that what is best on the whole should take place; and so do they. Since God sees that these sins will be for the best, he is on the whole, willing that they should take place; and since he has made this known to them, they are willing that they should take place, with the same kind of willingness that God is, and for the same reason. When God revealed to the ancient prophets, that it was a part of the plan of redemption that Christ should be betrayed and murdered; when they saw that this was the plan which God chose, and had reason, therefore, to conclude that it was the wisest and best plan possible, it was easy for them to acquiesce in it as such, and to choose that it should be accomplished. And this acquiescence on their part, would not imply in them any approbation of treachery or murder. When they saw that God chose on the whole that this treachery and murder should take place, it was easy for them to choose it too, for the sake of the good which God would accomplish by means of it. And their making such a choice, does not imply

in them any love of these sins, any more than it does in God, when he makes the same choice. And it was not only possible for them to make this choice, with these views and reasons, but it was their duty to do so. It was their duty to hate and abhor all treachery and murder; but when they saw, by divine inspiration, that it was in this case for the best that they should be committed, it was their duty to choose that they should be committed, and not to choose that the whole plan of redemption should be given up, in order to avoid them. In like manner, therefore, if God sees that it will be for the best, that the saints should not be entirely freed from sin in this life, he chooses that they should not. And he chooses it for that reason alone, and not because he has any delight in sin, for he has not. And if he has made known in his word that it is for the best that the saints should not be entirely freed from sin in this life, and that for this reason he chooses they should not, they may make the same choice, for the same reason. And since it does not imply any love of sin in God, when he makes this choice for this reason, neither does it imply any love of sin in the saints, when they make the same choice for the same reason. But, to prevent mistakes, let it be carefully noted, that a willingness that sin should take place in ourselves or others, to be right, must be entirely free from a love of sin, it must be entirely free from any motives of self-

gratification, it must be entirely from a devotedness to the glory of God; in short, it must be just such a willingness that sin should take place as God himself feels. This kind of willingness that sin should take place, is very different from that willingness which the sinner feels. They are directly opposite and contrary to each other. God is willing that sin should take place in all those instances in which it does take place, not for its own sake, for he abhors it, but because he sees it will be for the greatest good of the universe, because he sees it will afford an occasion of displaying, to better advantage, his own glorious perfections. But the sinner is willing that sin should take place, in himself and others, for its own sake, because he loves it, because he hates holiness, and has no regard for the greatest good of the universe, nor the glory of the divine character. When the saints are willing that sin should take place, therefore, whether in themselves or others, that willingness must be just such a willingness as God feels, it must be an act of submission to God's will; for if not, it will not be a duty, but a sin.

Should it be objected, here, that if it is possible for us to have a present willingness that sin should take place in us at some future time, which is not a sinful willingness, but such a willingness as God feels, and is consistent with a perfect hatred and abhorrence of sin, why is it not possible for

us actually to commit sin, from a regard to the glory of God, and so, "do evil, that good may come"? This question has been already answered, in the reply to a former objection. It is impossible that we should commit sin, with a view to do good. To have a supreme regard to the glory of God, is to exercise a right disposition. But to commit sin, is to exercise a wrong disposition. And to exercise a wrong disposition with a right disposition, is a contradiction. The objection arises entirely from confounding two distinct acts of the mind. The act of submission is *one act*, and the act of sin is *another act*. And they cannot both take place at the same time. One must succeed the other. The first act may have some reference to the second, but it is totally distinct from it, and may be of a nature directly opposite. We often hear sinners, under awakenings, say, they desire to repent. This desire is one act, and the act of repentance is another act. The first has reference to the second, but they are entirely distinct, and they may be of a nature directly opposite. The act of repentance must have the glory of God for its object. But the desire to repent, may have nothing but our personal safety for its object. And if it has nothing but *self* for its object, it is a sinful act. It is a sinful willingness to be the subject of a holy exercise. So, in this case, the act of submission, and the act of sin, are distinct acts. The act of sin

cannot have the glory of God for its object, but the act of submission must have the glory of God for its object. A present willingness to have sin take place in us at some future time, may be just such a willingness as God feels, it may be an act of submission to God. It may be a holy willingness to be the subject of a sinful exercise, just as a sinful desire of repentance, may be a sinful willingness to be the subject of a holy exercise. But the actual exercise of sin, is a very different thing from the act of submission, and can never be performed with a view to the glory of God.

Objection 12. It is said, that if this doctrine is true, and God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass, then he has decreed that some men should continue finally impenitent, and perish forever. But all are bound to submit to God's will, to acquiesce in whatever he ordains. All ought, therefore, to choose that those should continue sinners, whom God chooses should continue so, and all ought to choose that those should be damned, whom God chooses should be damned. But since *all* are alike bound to acquiesce in God's will, those very persons, who are the subjects of this decree of reprobation, are as much bound to acquiesce in it, as any others. And since we do not certainly know but that *we* are included in that decree of reprobation, we ought to be willing to acquiesce in it, if it should prove to be so; that is, we ought to be willing to be finally impenitent,

and to be damned, if it should prove to be God's determination respecting us. But, it is said, being willing to be damned, and being willing to be finally impenitent, is nothing else than being willing to sin, nothing else than being willing to curse and blaspheme God for ever, nothing else than "being willing to be an infernal;" and it is thought, that being willing to sin, is actually committing sin, and that "being willing to be an infernal," is little short of being one already. It cannot, therefore, it is thought, be the duty of any one to be willing to be damned, or to be willing to sin, under any circumstances. But since it is the duty of every one to submit unconditionally to the will of God, it cannot be the will of God that any one should sin, or that any one should be damned; and therefore, it cannot be true that God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass.

Answer. It is undoubtedly true, that all are bound to submit to God's will, and to acquiesce in whatever he ordains. And this submission must be unconditional; for a conditional submission is no submission at all. And it is also true, that if God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass, he has decreed that some should be finally impenitent and be damned. All are bound, therefore, to be willing that some should continue finally impenitent and be damned. And while it is unknown who are included in that decree of reprobation, we are no more at liberty to withhold our

assent to it, than we shall be after it is known. And we are not at liberty to stipulate, when we give our assent, that *we* shall not be the persons. We must leave that with God. He will order it wisely. To say we are at liberty to make this stipulation, is the same as to say, we may withhold our assent, if this stipulation is not admitted, which is the same as to say, that we are not bound to acquiesce at all, but may act our pleasure. And when it shall be known who are included in the decree of reprobation, we shall not then be any more at liberty to withhold our assent. And if it should be found that *we are the persons*, that will give us no right to rebel against it. We shall still be bound to acquiesce, as much as we should be, if others were in our place, and we were left out. We should love our neighbor as ourselves. If *our* being included in that decree, would render it proper for us to oppose it, our neighbor's being included, would render it equally proper for us to oppose it. But we should have no right to oppose it, in either case. We are bound to acquiesce entirely in what God ordains. If God, in infinite wisdom, sees that it will be for the best, that Judas should be a reprobate, and perish for ever, and has so decreed, and made known to us that this is the case, we are bound to acquiesce. If God chooses that Judas should suffer the pains of hell eternally, we ought to choose it too. And it is not seen why Judas is not bound to acquiesce

in it, as much as any others. It is not seen why Judas is not as much bound to submit to God's will respecting him as other beings are. And if God chooses that Judas should suffer the pains of hell eternally, because he sees that it will be for the best, and all others are bound to choose it too, because God does, why is not Judas bound to make the same choice, for the same reason? And if God chooses that Judas should go on in sin to eternity, because he sees that it will be for the best, and all other creatures are bound to choose it too, because God does, why is not Judas bound to make the same choice, for the same reason? What makes it the duty of Judas to rebel against the will of God, when all other creatures are bound to acquiesce in it? But the chief difficulty seems to lie in this; it is said that, being willing to sin, is actually committing sin. It is thought, however, that what has been said in answer to the last objection, has been sufficient to remove this difficulty. It has been seen that there are *two kinds of willingness* that sin should take place, one, that which God feels, and another, that which the sinner feels. And these two kinds of willingness are very different from each other, and of a nature directly opposite. One is consistent with the greatest abhorrence of sin, and the other implies a love of sin. The latter is a sinful willingness, but the former is not. To feel such a willingness that sin should take place, as

God feels, is the duty of all. But to feel such a willingness that sin should take place, as the sinner feels, is actually committing sin. It is our duty to feel as God feels, respecting it; and consequently, it is not our duty to feel in a different manner. In the great day, when the wicked are sentenced to hell, all holy beings will acquiesce in it, and choose that they should be sent there. But those who go there will continue to sin, they will curse and blaspheme God to eternity. To choose that the wicked should be sent to hell, therefore, is not only choosing that they should suffer eternal pain, but it is also choosing that they should continue to sin, it is choosing that they should curse and blaspheme God to eternity. And when holy beings, in the great day, acquiesce in all this, and choose all this, it will not imply in them any love of sin, or any delight in the curses and blasphemies of the damned. And it will not only be possible for all holy beings to acquiesce in this sentence, but it will be their duty to acquiesce in it, and to choose that it should take place. And it will not be the duty of holy beings only, but it will also be the duty of wicked beings; it will be the duty of the whole universe of creatures, to acquiesce in this sentence, and to choose that it should take place. Their being wicked does not alter the nature of their duty, nor free them from their obligations to discharge it. And their being the subjects of the sentence will

no more give them a right to rebel against it, than it will give other beings a right to rebel against it. It is true that they never will exercise this unconditional submission to God's will; but what they will do, and what they ought to do, are very different things. It is true that the damned will always feel that willingness to sin, which implies a love of sin, that willingness which is a sinful willingness. It is true that they always will love sin, and hate holiness, that they always will be opposed to the will of God, and his holy government. But it is not, on that account, any the less certain, that they ought to feel in a very different manner. In the great day, when God has pronounced the final sentence upon the wicked, it will be known that it is his will that they should suffer the pains of hell to eternity. It will be their duty, therefore, to submit to this sentence, and acquiesce in it, because it is for the glory of God that they should so suffer. It is true, indeed, that they will not exercise this submission, but will always rage and rebel against God. But that does not alter their duty. Again, when the final sentence shall be pronounced upon the wicked, it will be known that it is God's will that they should continue sinners to eternity. And all holy beings will acquiesce in this, and choose it too, for the same reason that God does, namely, because it will be most for his glory, and the good of the universe. But the willingness which

God, and all holy beings, will feel, that this should take place, will not be a sinful willingness, it will not be a willingness which implies in it any love of sin, but the contrary. And those who are the subjects of this sentence, ought to acquiesce in it, as much as other beings, and they ought to feel the same kind of willingness that it should take place, which God and all holy beings will feel. It is true, indeed, that they will not. They will feel a willingness to be sinners, but it will be a willingness of a very different nature from that which they ought to feel, and from that which God will feel that they should be so; it will be a willingness which implies a love of sin; it will be a sinful willingness. The pains they will suffer, will have no tendency to wean them from their love of sin, or to make them love God and holiness; but they will continue to love sin with all their hearts, and to hate God and holiness for ever.

And since we do not yet know, with certainty, what God has determined respecting us, we ought to be willing to be entirely in his hands, as clay in the hands of the potter, that he may mould us into such vessels as he pleases, and dispose of us at last, just as he pleases. We ought to be willing that he should make us any thing that he shall see most for his glory: and since we do not know with certainty but that the glory of God will require our eternal destruction, we ought to be will-

ing to submit, and to acquiesce in God's will, if it should prove to be so. But when he requires this of us, he does not require us to love pain, or to choose it for its own sake; nor does he require us to be willing that sin should take place, in ourselves or others, with any kind of willingness which implies a love of sin, but the contrary. And while we commit ourselves to him, to be disposed of, as he shall deem proper, it is our constant duty to hate every sin, to love God with all our hearts, and our neighbor as ourselves, and to express this love in all those ways which he has pointed out in his holy word.

SERMON VIII.

EPHESIANS I. 11.

Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

WE proceed in the discussion of objections.

Objection 13. It is said, that God requires us to repent of sin. But to repent of sin, implies that we are sorry that we have sinned, that we regret that we have sinned, that we wish we had not sinned. But God requires us to feel just as he feels. God, therefore, repents that we have sinned, he is sorry that we have sinned, he wishes we had not sinned. When the world became so wicked in the days of Noah, we read, Gen. 6. 6. "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." But this is totally inconsistent with his decreeing and causing sin to take place. It cannot be true, therefore, that he either decrees or causes it.

Answer. It is true that God requires us to feel towards sin and holiness, just as he feels. But the objection takes something for granted, which is not true, namely, that God does, *on the whole,*

regret that sin has taken place, or that he requires us to do so. That repentance which we are required to exercise, consists in a disapprobation of sin, considered as it is in its own nature, together with a loathing and abhorring of ourselves as sinners. The true penitent hates sin, in itself considered, and hates himself, considered as a sinner; he views his own character with shame and detestation, and considering sin as it is in itself, he looks back upon his sin with the deepest sorrow. But considering the sins which have taken place, in connection with the great good, which God brings out of them, which could not otherwise be accomplished; considering them as upon the whole, for the best, and necessary for the greatest good of the universe, the good man does not, upon the whole, wish they had not taken place. No good man can, on the whole, wish that Christ had not been crucified, and so, that an atonement had not been made, for the sins of the world. It was in this view of the subject, that the apostle could say, Rom. 6. 17. "God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin." It was, on the whole, for the best, that they had been, for a time, the servants of sin. And when the good man looks back upon his own sins, though in themselves he abhors them, and abhors himself on account of them; yet, considered as a part of God's infinitely wise and benevolent plan, he does not wish, on the whole, that they had not taken place.

It is said, however, that God requires us to feel towards sin as he feels; and that, when he saw the corruption of the old world, he repented that he had made man upon the earth, and given him an opportunity to conduct in such a manner, which expresses a strong wish that he had not conducted in such a manner. *Answer.* Let us suppose, for a moment, that God does, *on the whole*, wish that man had not sinned, that he did, on the whole, regret that he had made man, when he saw his wicked conduct; and where will it lead us? If God did, on the whole, wish he had not made man, he had changed his mind, and was sorry for what he had done. If he changed his mind, it must be for some reason, or for no reason. It will not be said that God changed his mind without any reason. If he really changed his mind, it was because man had conducted in a manner which he did not expect. When he made him, he expected he would do better than he now finds he has, and so he wishes he had not made him. But this supposition destroys the foreknowledge of God. And this supposition makes God progressive in his knowledge, like ourselves. And if this is true, then, if we go back eternally, we shall find God without any knowledge, as well as without any determinations. This is blank atheism. But if God knew all things from eternity, then he knew how man would conduct, before he made him, as well as he does now.

And consequently, if, in the view of all his conduct, he did then, on the whole, choose to make him, he cannot now, in the same view of his conduct, wish he had not made him. To say that he does, is to say, that he has changed his mind without any reason. When God, therefore, is said to repent that he had made man, and to be grieved at his heart, it cannot mean, that he does, on the whole, wish he had not made him. But it must mean, that, in itself considered, the conduct of man was so undesirable and odious, that when the good consequences were left out of view, the existence of man was an undesirable event, and a matter of grief. And so God feels towards every sin that is past. In themselves considered, he views them as exceedingly undesirable and odious; but when he considers them in connection with the good he will bring out of them, which could not otherwise be attained, all things considered, he does not wish they had not taken place, or he would have prevented their taking place; nor does he require his creatures to wish, on the whole, that they had not taken place. Past sins, as well as present and future sins, may be considered as they are in themselves, and they may be considered as they are on the whole. In themselves considered, they are exceedingly undesirable; but, on the whole, all that do take place, under the wise government of God, are for the best, and in that point of view, God can, and does,

decree and cause them to take place; and good men may, on the whole, rejoice that they do take place, and with the apostle thank God that they have taken place, in perfect consistency with the deepest repentance, and the most genuine godly sorrow.

Objection 14. It is said, that the scriptures expressly contradict the doctrine supported in these discoursés; for we read, James 1. 13. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." And this passage is thought abundantly sufficient to answer all those passages which are brought to prove that God does decree or cause the wicked actions of men.

Answer. It is undoubtedly true, that the scripture is consistent with itself, and that it does not teach one thing in one place, and the contrary in another. And if this passage does, in fact, deny the agency of God in producing the wicked actions of men, then it cannot be true that it is taught in any of those passages which have been brought to prove it. But are we sure that this passage does deny this? The word *tempt* is used, in scripture, in different senses. If this is not the case, the scripture contradicts itself. For it says, that God does *tempt* men, as in Gen. 22. 1. "It came to pass, after these things, that God did *tempt* Abraham;" and in this place, it says he

does not tempt any man. In order, therefore, to substantiate this objection, it must be proved, that to *tempt*, in this passage, is used to signify just such an agency in causing the actions of men, as in these discourses, is ascribed to God. Those who make the objection, therefore, are bound to prove this, before they ask us to conclude that our doctrine is not true. To *tempt*, is sometimes used to signify a sinful act, a wicked enticing to sin, by representing it in false colors, as good and desirable. In this sense it is used, when applied to Satan and wicked men. They always tempt others in this sense. In this sense, God does not tempt any man. And our doctrine does not make him do so. He is holy in all his works. Whatever influence he uses upon the minds of men, to make them accomplish his purposes, he always does right; and he always designs and accomplishes good, by what he does. If the word *may* be used in this sense, in the passage before us, then this passage *may not* contradict the doctrine advanced in these discourses. And as this sense will reconcile it with those numerous passages which expressly assert that God worketh all things; and as the sense put upon it by those who bring the objection, would make it contradict them, we ought to understand it in this sense, and not in one that will make the scripture a mass of contradictions.

This objection, however, will admit of a differ-

ent answer. This passage speaks only of *tempting* men to sin; but the object of inquiry, in these discourses, is not who *tempts* men to sin, but who *causes* them to sin. *Tempting* men to sin, is not *causing* them to sin, for they may be tempted, and yet not sin. And though it should be proved that God tempted them to sin, it would not follow that he caused them to sin. Neither will it follow, because he *causes* them to sin, that therefore, he also *tempts* them. Satan is the tempter. He brings the temptation before the mind, and the mind chooses or refuses. But what causes it to choose or refuse? What causes it to comply with the temptation, or reject it, as the case may be? To this question, the answer is, God causes men to will and do whatever they will and do. But the act of *presenting* the temptation, and the act of *causing* a compliance with it, are entirely distinct from each other, and are performed by different agents. And though it should be said that God causes Satan to tempt men, this would not be saying that it is God that tempts them, any more than it would be saying it is God that walks, when we say he causes men to walk. This objection, therefore, does not apply to the doctrine supported in these discourses, even though the passage should mean, that God does not *tempt* men, in any sense of the word.

Objection 15. It is said, that this doctrine is *new divinity*; that it is the offspring of the mod-

ern philosophy. And the exhortation of the apostle is, "Beware, lest any man spoil you, through philosophy and vain deceit." "Hold fast the form of sound words." "Earnestly contend for the faith which was *once* delivered to the saints." We have in our Westminster Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, an excellent system of divinity. Let us hold them fast, and not admit any new-fangled doctrines.

Answer. Here, with all due deference to antiquity, we would ask, does it follow that any scheme is right, because it is old? Are we bound, in all cases, to receive the traditions of the fathers, without examination? Is it reasonable to condemn a thing unheard and unexamined, because it is new? Is it not our duty to search the scriptures, and see whether these things are so? "*To the law, and to the testimony; if we speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in us.*" The Confession of Faith and Catechisms, compiled by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, and adopted by our church, are, indeed, an excellent system of doctrines. They are, perhaps, the best that ever have been compiled; but they may not be infallible, in every respect. We ought, therefore, to be well acquainted with them, and know what doctrines they do contain, and on what scripture evidence those doctrines are founded. But the doctrine which is supported in these discourses, is not *new divinity*.

It is not the offspring of the modern infidel philosophy, as some would make us believe. No, it is *old divinity*. It is the divinity of the great Reformers from Popery; it is the divinity of our Confession of Faith and Catechism, as well as the divinity of the Bible. It is those that deny this doctrine, that have departed from the traditions of the fathers, and from that form of sound words which they profess to hold. These assertions are not made without evidence. And enough of that evidence shall be produced, to convince you.

1. It was the doctrine of that first great Reformer, *Martin Luther*, as the following extracts from his writings will show.* In a book which he wrote against the Arminian notion of free will, entitled "*De Servo Arbitrio*," that is, "*Free will a Slave*," he says, "Both good and evil men, by their actions, fulfil the decree and appointment of God."† Again, "This mightily offends our

* By making these extracts from Luher and others, the author would not be understood as approving of all their language or sentiments. He thinks some of their language very objectionable. His object is to show, that they believed and taught the doctrine of the universal decrees and agency of God: and he thinks the extracts from them render that point abundantly manifest. Whether they had clear views of the consistency of that doctrine with that of the free agency and ability of the creature, is another question. Some of their language renders it probable that they had not.

† De Servo Arb. cap. 44. These extracts from Luther, are copied from Toplady's translation of Zanchius on Predestination, and are undoubtedly correct,

rational nature, that God should, of his own mere unbiassed will, leave some men to themselves, *harden them*, and then condemn them. But he has given abundant demonstration, and does continually, that this is really the case, namely, that the sole cause why some are saved and others perish, proceeds from his willing the salvation of the former, and the perdition of the latter, according to that of Paul, 'He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.' " * Again, "Whatever man does, he does *necessarily*, though not with any sensible compulsion. We can only do what God from eternity willed and foreknew we should, which will of God must be *effectual*, and his foresight must be certain." Again, "It may seem absurd to human wisdom, that God should *harden, blind, and deliver up* some men to a reprobate sense; that he should first deliver them over to evil; and then condemn them for that evil; but the believing, spiritual man sees no absurdity at all in this." † Here is a sentence which is worthy of particular attention. "GOD WORKETH ALL THINGS IN MEN, EVEN WICKEDNESS IN THE WICKED: for this is one branch of his own omnipotence." ‡ Again, "God would not be a respectable being, if he were not almighty, and *the doer of all things that are done*;§ or if any thing could come to

* De Servo Arb. cap. 161. † Cap. 8, 146. ‡ Cap. 8, 165.

§ By *doer*, Luther appears to mean the *causer*, and not the *actor*, properly speaking, or in such a sense as to exclude the creature's agency.

pass, in which he had no hand."* These are the words of Luther. Surely, no one, after reading these passages from his writings, can doubt, that Luther held the doctrines supported in these discourses. If he could say, that "*God worketh all things in men, even wickedness in the wicked,*" and that he is "*the doer of all things that are done,*" he fully believed, that God has not only decreed whatsoever comes to pass, but that he executes his decrees by his own agency. And he did not think it an unprofitable doctrine. He was very warm against Erasmus for opposing its being preached, and gives some very satisfactory reasons why it should be freely taught. He says, "Without the knowledge of this doctrine, it is not possible that there should be any faith in God, or any proper worship of him."† And *Melancthon*, the friend of Luther, says, "A right fear of God, and a true confidence in him, can be learned more assuredly from no other source, than from the doctrine of predestination." *Peter Martyr*, another of the Reformers, says, "He (God) supplies wicked men with opportunities of sinning, and *inclines their hearts thereto.* He *blinds, deceives, and seduces* them. He, *by his working on their hearts, bends, and stirs them up to do evil.*"‡ And *Zwinglius*, another Reformer, says, "When *God makes angels or men sin*, he does not sin himself, because he does not break any law."§

* De Servo Arb. c. 160.

† De Serve Arb. c. 20.

‡ Com. Rem. b. xxxvi.

§ Serm. de Prov.

2. It was the doctrine of *John Calvin*. In his *Institutes*, or system of divinity, he has a chapter upon this very subject,* in which he professes to show, "that God doth so use the service of wicked men, and so *boweth their minds* to put his judgments in execution, that still himself remaineth pure from all spot." The second section of which chapter shows, that "the Providence of God is a governess, which *directeth all the inclinations of the mind of man*, whether they bend unto good or evil." In this chapter, he says, "*Men do nothing but by the secret commandment of God.*" Meaning, doubtless, his secret influence. Again, he says, "But nothing can be desired to be more plainly spoken, than where he so often pronounceth that he *blindeth* the eyes of men, and striketh them with giddiness; that he maketh them drunk with the spirit of drowsiness, casteth them into madness, and *hardeneth* their hearts." Again, "Absalom, defiling his father's bed with incestuous adultery, committed detestable wickedness; yet *God pronounced that this was his own work*; for the words are these: 'Thou hast done it secretly, but *I will do it* openly, and before the sun.' " Again, "These things many do refer to sufferance, (permission,) as if, in forsaking the reprobate, he suffered them to be blinded by Satan. But that solution is too fond, confident, forasmuch as the Holy Ghost, in plain words, ex-

* The eighteenth chapter of the first book.

presseth, that they are stricken with blindness and madness by the just judgment of God. It is said that he hardened the heart of Pharaoh; also that he did make dull and strengthen it. Some do, with an unsavory cavillation, mock out these phrases of speech, because where in another place, it is said, Pharaoh did harden his own heart, there is his own will set for the cause of his hardening, as though these things did not very well agree together. Although in divers manners that man, while he is *moved* in working by God, doth also *work himself*." Here, Calvin explicitly maintains the consistency of the agency of God with the agency of the creature, and teaches the same doctrine which is supported in these discourses, that we *act*, and at the same time are *caused to act* by divine power. Again, he says, still more explicitly, "I grant that *God doth oftentimes work in the reprobate* by Satan's service, as a mean; but yet so that *Satan doth his office* BY GOD'S MOVING. It is also said that the same Satan doth blind the minds of the unfaithful, but how so, but only because *the effectual working of error cometh from God himself, to make them believe lies*." Can there remain any doubt that Calvin taught the doctrine of these discourses? But let us read further. It appears that there were some in the days of Calvin, as well as in our own, who denied the divine agency in producing the actions of wicked men, and endeavor-

ed to explain those scriptures which assert it, to mean nothing more than that God *permits* them to do as they do. These men, at this day, often call themselves strict Calvinists. Let us see, then, what Calvin says of such Calvinists. Speaking of them, he observes, "And their modesty were, peradventure, excusable, whom the show of absurdity putteth in fear, if it were not so, that they *wrongfully*, and with a *lying defence*, go about to deliver the justice of God from all unrightful blame. It seemeth to them unreasonable, that man should, by the will and commandment of God, be made blind, and so, by and by, be punished for his blindness; therefore, they seek to escape by this shift, that this is done by the *permission*, but not by the will of God. But he himself plainly pronouncing that *he doeth it*, does reject that shift." Again, he says, "Forasmuch as hitherto I have recited only such things as are written in the scriptures plainly, not doubtfully; let them that fear not wrongfully to slander the heavenly oracles, take heed what manner of judgment they take upon them; for if by feigned pretending of ignorance they seek a praise of modesty, what can be imagined more proudly done, than to set one small word against the authority of God! But if they openly speak evil what prevail they with spitting against the heaven? But this is no new example of waywardness, because there have been in all ages wicked and un-

godly men, that with raging mouth barked against this point of doctrine." Again, he says, "And now I have showed, plainly enough, that *God is the author* (cause) of all those things, which these judges would have to happen only by his idle *permission*." He recognises the distinction which we make between the will of command and will of decree, or willing things as they are *in themselves*, or as they are *on the whole*, and says, "By the weakness of our wit, we conceive not how God, in divers manner, willeth, and willeth not, one self thing." Again, in his commentary on Rom. 9. 18, he says, "This word of *hardening*, which in the scriptures is ascribed to God, does not signify *permission* merely, but *agency*." And in his commentary on Ex. 7. 3, he calls those *cold speculatists*, who turn it into a bare *permission*.* But the writings of Calvin are so full of this doctrine, that it needs but a very slight acquaintance with them, to perceive that the charge of not being Calvinistic, which is sometimes made against those who hold and teach this doctrine, belongs not to them, but to those who deny it, and who are the very persons that make the charge.

3. It was the doctrine of the celebrated *Witsius*. *Witsius* lived after the reformed religion had become established. He was a professor of

* In the original, it is *frigidi speculatores*. Another epithet he gives them, still more expressive, is *diluti moderatores*.

divinity, in one of the universities of Holland. His works are in very high estimation, among those reputed orthodox, both in Europe and America. Mr. Hervey, in his *Theron and Aspasio*, says of the works of Witsius, "I know not any comparison more proper to represent their true character, than the golden pot which had manna; and was outwardly bright with burnished gold, inwardly rich with heavenly food." His "*Economy of the Covenants*," from which the following extracts are made, is recommended in the highest terms, by some of the most respected of those divines in America who are considered as maintaining the firmest stand against new divinity. They say, "Great erudition, solid argument, and accurate criticism, are here happily employed in establishing the truth, and vindicating the peculiar doctrines of the gospel. No book that has been published, since the reformation of the church, is more worthy the attention and study of candidates for the ministry."* A book with such recommendations, will not be sus-

* The following, among other distinguished names, are subscribed to this recommendation. Of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Rev. John H. Livingston, D. D. S. T. P., President of the College at New-Brunswick, N. J., the Rev. William Linn, D. D., the Rev. John N. Abee, D. D., and the Rev. G. A. Kuypers, D. D.: Of the Associate Reformed Church, the Rev. John M. Mason, D. D., Provost of Columbia College, and Professor of Divinity in the Theological Seminary at New-York: And of the Presbyterian Church, the Rev. Ashbel Green, D. D., President of the College at Princeton, N. J., the Rev. John

pected of *new divinity*. Let us hear, then, what Witsius says on the subject before us.

In one place, speaking of the powers with which God had created man, he says, "It was requisite that God, by the continual influence of his providence, should preserve those powers, and excite them to all and each of their acts. For in no state can a creature be, or (be) conceived to be working any thing independently of the creator."* In other places, he says, "I think it will be readily granted, that there is but one first cause. If the human will could produce any action, of which God was not the author, (cause) the human will would have the nature of a first principle." "A second cause cannot act, unless acted upon, and previously moved to act, by the preventing and predetermining influence of the first cause." "Since the act of sin is a kind of *being*, it would follow, that if the actions of sin, as actions, are not from God, there would be some being which had not its essence from God; and thus, God would not be the universal cause of all beings; which is contrary to the perfection of the first being." "Neither does God only excite and predetermine the will of men to vicious actions, but he so excites it, that it is not possible, but thus

Rogers, D. D., the Rev. Samuel Miller, D. D., Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, the Rev. John McKnight, D. D., and the Rev. Philip Milledoler, D. D.

* Book I, chap. 2, section 13.

acted upon, it shall act." Again, speaking of the first sin of man, he says, "Supposing, therefore, that God had afforded his influence to the natural act of reasoning, willing, eating, as he actually did, it could not otherwise be, but that man should act at that time. All this holds true, not only with respect to this first sin of man, but with respect to all other sins. As these things are matters of evident truth, I see not why we may not boldly maintain them, especially as they tend to the glory of God, and to demonstrate his supereminence, and the absolute dependence of the creatures upon him, as much in their operations, as in their existence."*

4. It is the doctrine of our Confession of Faith and Catechism. In the Confession of Faith, ch. 5, sec. 4, it is said, "The almighty power, un-

* B. I, ch. 8, sec. 13, and onward. It will perhaps be said, that Witsius is not quoted fairly, because only a few detached sentences are taken from different places, and the whole of what he says on this subject, is not inserted. It must be recollected, however, that the particular point supported in these discourses, is, *that God causes all the actions of men, whether good or evil.* As to this point, Witsius is fairly quoted, as every one may see, by reading the sections referred to. He does, indeed, for the purpose of obviating a supposed difficulty, attempt to show that God can cause the actions of men, *as actions*, without causing their qualities. But this distinction, whether well or ill founded, does not affect the question before us, which is simply whether God causes all the actions of men; and that he does this, Witsius fully believed, and plainly taught. What he says on the subject of this distinction, is merely *his way* of answering an objection, which we have answered in a different manner. It is, therefore, omitted, as of no importance in this place.

searchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his Providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as has joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends." Here, it is asserted that the Providence of God extends itself to every sin, and that by something more than a bare permission, that is, by a positive and powerful agency, ordering and governing them. The same thing is asserted in the Catechism, Question 11. "What are God's works of Providence? Ans. God's works of Providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions." Here, God is said not only to preserve, but to govern, and to govern powerfully; not only some of the actions of his creatures, but all their actions. And governing, is not barely limiting and restraining, but ordering and directing. It is not merely causing things not to be done, but it is also causing things to be done. Thus, then, it is the professed doctrine of all our church, that God, by his powerful agency, orders and directs all the actions of all his creatures.

That the Westminster Assembly of Divines, who composed this Confession of Faith and Catechism, mean to be understood, in these passages,

to assert that God causes all the actions of men by his powerful agency, will be more evident by consulting their other writings. Doctor *Twisse*, who was Prolocutor of that Assembly, and who may, therefore, be considered as speaking their unanimous sentiment, says, "All things come to pass by the efficacious and irresistible will of God."* Again, "It is impossible that any thing should be done, but that to which God impels the will of man."† Again, "God is the author (cause) of that action which is sinful, by his irresistible will."‡

Thus, then, it appears, that this doctrine is not new, but old divinity; that it was the doctrine of the Reformation, and has been the doctrine of all the orthodox from that time to the present.

* *Vindiciæ*, b. iii. p. 19. The works of *Twisse* not being at hand, these passages are given as they are quoted from him by another writer.

† *Vindiciæ*, b. iii. p. 10.

‡ *Pars*. b. iii. p. 21. *Twisse* also attempts to establish the same distinction which *Witsius*, and other old divines make, between actions and their qualities: and to show that God causes the one without causing the other. But they agree with us perfectly, as to the point supported in these discourses, to wit, that God, by his agency, causes all the actions of all his creatures.

SERMON IX.

EPIHESIANS I. 11.

Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

HAVING attended to the principal objections that are made against the doctrine supported in these discourses, what remains, is the

IMPROVEMENT.

And 1. If the doctrine we have supported is true, then God is a happy being. The happiness of God depends on his effecting what he desires and chooses. He desires and chooses with all his heart. And if his desires are not gratified, if his choice is counteracted, he is disappointed and unhappy. God is a being of infinite wisdom and goodness. He has formed his plan, in the wisest and best manner; and he strongly desires the accomplishment of that which is wisest and best. But if he cannot carry his plan into execution, if Satan and wicked men have it in their power to thwart his designs, and counteract all his wisest measures, he must be doomed to see himself perpetually disappointed, and consequent-

ly must be infinitely miserable. God is a being of infinite benevolence. He strongly and invariably desires the greatest good of the universe, and is continually engaged, with all his heart, in promoting it. And he strongly desires the good of every individual being, so far as it is consistent with the greatest good of the whole. But if the sin and misery that exist, are not for the greatest good of the whole, and come to pass contrary to his will, and in opposition to his strongest desires, can we conceive of a being more wretched than God must be, thus to see the fair fabric which he has made, so completely ruined, and Satan, the great enemy of God and man, triumphing in the eternal damnation of so many millions of those creatures which he had made for happiness and glory! But if the doctrine we have supported is true, if God has decreed and causes whatsoever comes to pass, then we may infallibly conclude, that whatsoever comes to pass is wisest and best on the whole, and that God is infinitely happy, while engaged in promoting, without the possibility of disappointment, the highest felicity of the intelligent universe.

2. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then the saints will be happy when they get to heaven. The saints are benevolent beings. Their own personal interest, is not their chief object. They strongly desire the greatest good of the universe. And when they

reach heaven, and take a view of the divine administration, in the light of eternity, if they see that the greatest good of the universe has not been promoted, if they see that things might have been ordered better than they have been, that what was wisest and best has not taken place, it will mar all their joys, it will render them for ever unhappy. When they see their fellow creatures in the regions of despair, suffering the severest torments, and reflect, that they might have been saved, consistently with the general good, it will pierce their hearts with the keenest anguish. But if the doctrine we have supported is true, and God does decree and cause those things to take place, which are wisest and best; then, when the light of eternity shall enable the saints to see things as they are, they will perceive that the greatest good of the universe has been promoted; they will perceive that the character of God is completely vindicated from all the aspersions of wicked men, and all his glorious perfections displayed to the best advantage; they will perceive that the greatest possible sum of good to intelligent beings has been secured, and they will be completely happy; their joy will rise to the highest pitch, while they sing, "Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."

3. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then the saints may trust in God now, and rejoice under all circumstances.

The highest good of the universe will be secured. Nothing will take place, which is not, upon the whole, wisest and best. And though the good man may see many things taking place now, which are, according to his limited view of things, exceedingly undesirable, many things which appear to him adapted to dishonor God, and introduce misery and wretchedness among his creatures; let him trust in God. Let him be assured, that for some reason, though to him unknown, it is all wisest and best. When he sees iniquity prevail, and the enemy come in like a flood; when he sees evil men and seducers waxing worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived; when he sees infidelity take off her mask, and blasphemy grow bold; let him trust in God. Let him be assured that his hand directs it all. Let him remember, that God will make the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of it he will restrain; that wicked men and devils are no more than his instruments, to accomplish the wisest and best designs; that God never loses sight of his object, and can never mistake in the means he uses to promote it. Let the believer, then, trust in God, under all circumstances, and rejoice that the Lord reigns. Let him now begin his song of triumph, and go on his way with gladness of heart. Let him hear and comply with the exhortation of the apostle, "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, rejoice."

4. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then we have proper grounds for submission, under the trials to which we are called. The proper object of submission, is the will of God. The language of submission is, "Father, not my will, but thine be done." But many of our trials come upon us through the instrumentality of wicked men. If God, then, does not cause, and has not decreed the wicked actions of men, so far from being our duty to submit to such trials, it is our duty not to submit. If God's will is opposed to them, our will ought to be opposed to them likewise. But if God has decreed, and does cause all the actions of wicked men, then, when they treat us with unkindness and injustice, we ought to see the hand of God in it, and be patient and submissive to his will. David gives this as a proper reason for submission. When Shimei came out to curse him, as he fled from his son Absalom, he says, "Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." He saw the hand of God in it, and exercised the most cordial resignation. And our Lord, in the view of his sufferings, of which wicked men were the instruments, says, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Let us follow examples so worthy our imitation, and when wicked men add insult to injury, and curses to contempt, let us say with David, "Let them alone, and let them curse, for the Lord hath bidden them."

5. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then let us feel our dependence, and realize our own nothingness. An independent spirit in a creature is a self-exalting spirit. This we all have by nature. We love to be independent. This feeling is intimately connected with our self-righteousness, our unbelief, and impenitence. Did we rightly feel our dependence, and our guilt, we should be humble and penitent, willing to renounce our own righteousness, and put our trust entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we are unwilling to believe that we are entirely dependent upon God. If we must grant that we are dependent on God for all our powers, yet we will not grant that we are dependent on him for the exercise of them. And if we can do some things independently of God, we feel as if we had some ground for self-exaltation. If we can perform some good actions, of which God is not the cause, we may take all the credit of them to ourselves. But if we are dependent on God for all our actions, then boasting is excluded. If we do no more than God causes us to do, by his powerful agency, then it is God that maketh us to differ from our fellow creatures, and we have no cause to be puffed up when we imagine we are wiser or better than they. When we see others falling into gross and scandalous sins, and covering themselves with contempt and infamy, let us remember, that if God willed, we should do even

worse than they. Let us, therefore, be mindful of our dependence, and of our sinfulness; let us feel our obligations to God for his distinguishing kindness to us, and let us walk humbly before him all our days.

6. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then, "let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." You are dependent upon God. It is his hand that holds you up. It is his hand that casts you down. Therefore, "be not high minded, but fear." You see that it is sometimes the will of God that his professed children should fall in a most grievous manner. You do not stand in your own strength. Beware, lest you be lifted up with pride, and God take this means to humble you. Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation. Be earnest in beseeching God to keep you by his almighty power. Look to Jesus for strength, and for grace to help in every time of need. Trust in him alone, and you shall be holden up.

7. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then we may infer the existence of God from every thing we see. We cannot open our eyes, but proofs of the divine existence croud upon us, from every quarter. The sun rises, and sets. The moon wanes, and fills her horn. The planets maintain their course. The blazing comet takes his unknown flight "through the void immense," and returns at his appointed

time. The seasons roll round, at their stated period. Seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, continue to succeed each other, in grateful vicissitude. And all this, by the agency of God. And those events also, which appear to us but small and trivial, no less bespeak an almighty hand. The falling of a sparrow, the motion of a hair of our heads, the dancing atoms that play in the sun beams, afford equal evidence of the existence of God. Wherever we turn our eyes, we see all nature springing into life and motion. But the smallest motion of the smallest particle of matter, or the least action of the least animal or insect, no less requires the divine agency to cause it, than the motion of the sun in the firmament, or the stated revolution of the earth. Hence.

8. We see, that to deny the doctrine of the universal agency of God, amounts to a denial of the existence of God. For, if one thing may come to pass without the agency of God, then another may. And if some things may come to pass without the agency of God, then all things may come to pass without the agency of God. And if all things may come to pass without the agency of God, then we cannot infer the existence of God from any thing we see. And if we cannot infer the existence of God from any thing we see, we have no proof of the divine existence, we have no reason to suppose that there

is a God. Indeed, if we cannot infer the existence of God from any thing we see, and there is no need of supposing that there is a God, in order to account for every thing we see, then it is unphilosophical, and contrary to all sound reasoning, to suppose that there is a God. And thus, atheism is the only rational scheme we can adopt. Let those, then, who deny the doctrine we have supported, beware what they do. Their sentiments lead directly to atheism. And if they pursue their own scheme, where it naturally leads them, they will yet become open and avowed atheists. Let them be exhorted, then, to examine the ground on which they stand, and retrace their steps, before it is too late. Let them renounce their errors, and without delay, embrace sentiments more consistent with reason, more agreeable to scripture, and more honorable to God.

9. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then there is no such thing in us as a moral *taste*, or *principle* of sin or holiness, distinct from *voluntary exercise*. It is supposed by some, that we have within us, by nature, an evil principle, or corrupt taste, which is distinct from voluntary exercise, and is the source or fountain whence all our sinful exercises proceed; and that in regeneration, a good taste, or principle of grace, is implanted within us, which is the source of all our virtuous exercises. But if the doctrine we have supported is true, there is no

foundation for such a supposition. It is a maxim of good reasoning, not to assign more causes for an effect, than are sufficient to produce it. If one cause is sufficient to produce the effect, and does operate and produce the effect, then no other cause can have any efficacy in producing it, that is, nothing else can be a cause of that effect. Therefore, if God causes all our voluntary exercises, by his powerful agency, there can be no other cause of them, that is, there can be no good or evil principle or taste, which is the cause of them. Having created the human soul, with the natural powers of perception, reason, conscience, memory, and will, "it was only requisite," says the celebrated Witsius, "that God, by the continual influence of his providence, should preserve these powers, and excite them to all and each of their acts." Nothing more is necessary, and therefore, according to all sound reasoning, nothing more is to be supposed. Indeed, those who hold to a principle or taste, are frequently inconsistent with themselves. For they often object to the doctrine of God's causing all our actions, that it makes men machines, by preventing their acting voluntarily. Now, although this objection does not apply to our doctrine, as we have already seen, yet it is fatal to the taste scheme. For it is true, that without voluntary action, men cannot be praise or blame worthy. Now, if there is a sinful principle in us by nature, which makes us

guilty and deserving of punishment, antecedently to all voluntary exercise, then sin consists in this sinful principle, and not in voluntary exercise. But if sin consists in a sinful principle, then it consists in something which is perfectly involuntary. And if sin consists in something which is perfectly involuntary, then it is a dictate of common sense, that there is nothing blame worthy in it, any more than there is in a fit of the palsy, or a pain in the head. If we can be sinful for possessing evil qualities which are involuntary, and we have exercised no will in or about them, then a barren spot of ground is wicked, and thorns and thistles are verily guilty. But no man feels to blame, and no man is to blame, for that which is perfectly involuntary. And to hold that we can be to blame for any thing involuntary, and yet bring this same objection against the doctrine of these discourses, is a contradiction. There is, therefore, no such thing as a principle of sin, or a principle of holiness; there is no such thing as involuntary sin, or involuntary holiness; but sin and holiness consist in voluntary exercise, and in nothing else. They consist entirely in supreme *love* to God, or supreme *love* to ourselves.

10. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then sinners are as able to comply with the invitations of the gospel, as they are to reject them. They have no *independent* power to do either. But sinners have all the natural

powers that the saints have. Men have the same natural faculties before as after regeneration. The sinner is no more, and no less dependent on God, than the saint. If it is proper to say, that the sinner is able to reject the offers of salvation, it is equally proper to say, that he is able to accept them. If he is able to go on in his sins, he is equally able to break off his sins, and turn to God. He has no power, in either case, but a dependent power. It is God that works in him to will and to do, in both cases. The truth is, sinners are as able to do all that God requires of them, as they are to do the contrary. They plead no want of ability to go on in their sins, because it is their own chosen way; and they would find no more want of ability to go in the way of holiness, if that was the choice of their hearts. It requires the same natural powers to love, as it does to hate an object; and it requires no others. Sinners have all these natural powers. And it is as easy to exercise these powers in loving God, as it is in loving sin; as easy to exercise them in obeying the divine commands, as in violating those commands. Hence,

11. We see that it is proper to exhort and command sinners to repent and believe the gospel. If sinners were willing to comply with the gospel terms, but *could not*, there would be no propriety in exhorting them to do so. It would be but mocking his misery, to throw a rope to a drown-

ing man, and exhort him to take hold of it, when he had no hands. But if sinners have all the powers that are necessary to comply with the gospel offer, and are only wanting in a disposition; if they *can*, but *will not*, then it is proper to exhort them, and command them, and entreat them, to forsake their sins and turn to God. There is a propriety in expostulating with them, as God does, "Turn ye, turn ye; why *will* ye die?"

12. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then there is encouragement for us to use means with sinners, for their salvation. Notwithstanding sinners are able to comply with the invitations of the gospel, they uniformly refuse. Notwithstanding all the joys of heaven are set before them, to allure them; notwithstanding hell is uncovered before them, to terrify them, and the shrieks of the damned, as it were, vibrate on their ear; notwithstanding they are convinced of the necessity of immediate repentance; notwithstanding they are urged to escape for their lives; notwithstanding the most moving expostulations are used with them, till they weep at their own folly; yet they still, as before, uniformly refuse. All our labor seems to be lost. All the arguments we can use, never induce them to take one step in the way to heaven. The case of sinners would be utterly hopeless, and all our exertions without any prospect of success, were it not for this truth, that God is a sovereign. He has

the hearts of all men in his hand, and he can turn them as the rivers of water are turned. He has determined to save some, and he will save some, notwithstanding all their obstinacy. He can make them willing in the day of his power, and he will do so. He will save as many as it is best on the whole should be saved, as many as is consistent with the general good. And though he changes their hearts, and renews them by his holy spirit, yet he works by means. They are begotten by the word of truth. This is the instrument, in God's hand. Here, then, is ground of encouragement for us to preach his word. And this is the only ground of encouragement. It pleases God sometimes, to bless his word, and make it the means of convincing and converting sinners. And to be instrumental in saving one soul, would richly compensate for a whole life spent in preaching the gospel.

13. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then this subject may afford us a good criterion by which to judge of our own character. Are we pleased with this doctrine? Do we love to have God dispose of us, and of every thing dear to us, both for time and eternity? Are we willing to be in God's hands, and to let him do what he will with us? Are we willing to be the clay, and let him be the potter, to mould us into such vessels as he pleases, and to put us to such use as he pleases? Are we willing to be

made vessels of mercy or vessels of wrath, as God shall see most for his glory? Are we willing that God should determine whether we shall be among the number of the elect, or among the number of the reprobate? Do we desire the glory of God, so much more than our own personal salvation, that if one of the two must be sacrificed, we choose it should be the latter? Were the glory of God to be tarnished, as the price of our salvation, should we choose rather to be lost, than to be saved on such terms? When God says, Rom. 9. 18, that "he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth," are we willing he should do so with us? When he says to Pharaoh, Exodus 9. 15, "Thou shalt be cut off from the earth: And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth," that is, that he had raised him up to be glorified in his destruction, are we willing he should treat us as he did Pharaoh? When we are uncertain how God will dispose of us for eternity, do we say with David, II Sam. 15. 26, "But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee: behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him"? Or, do we value our own personal interest supremely, and desire that every thing else should be sacrificed to promote it? Are we unwilling to be in God's hands, and to let him determine our final

state, as the good of the universe shall require? Would we "fain flee out of his hand"? Do we feel our hearts rise against the sovereignty of God? And does the idea of our being sacrificed to promote the glory of God, fill us with rage? When we hear God say, Prov. 16. 4, that he "hath made all things for himself; yea, even *the wicked for the day of evil*," that some men are, "as natural brute beasts, *made to be taken and destroyed*," II Pet. 2. 12, and that he will "send" some "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they might be damned," II Thess. 2. 11, 12, and that of others, "*he hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them*," John 12. 40—When we hear him say these things, and know not but we are the persons spoken of, how do we feel? Do we feel our proud hearts rise in opposition? Do we hate such a being as this? By this we may be assisted in judging what is our real character. If we are the friends of God, we shall love to place him on the throne, we shall love to have him reign, and *we shall love to have him dispose of us*. But if we have not this disposition, if we do not feel willing to submit unconditionally to his will, if we do not love an electing and reprobating Sovereign, we have reason to conclude that we are the enemies of God, and that we have no part nor lot in his holy kingdom. Do

you excuse yourselves by saying, as some do, that these doctrines are not true, and that the character exhibited is not the character of God, but of Satan, and that therefore you are not bound to love, but to hate it? Take heed what you do. Take heed how you blaspheme the God of heaven. He that reproacheth God, let him answer it. If you hate and oppose this God, and cease not to blaspheme his name, and he proves, at last, to be the true God, what becomes of you? what character belongs to you? and whose children do you prove yourselves?

Finally. If God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, then impenitent sinners have cause to tremble. You are in the hands of God. You cannot get out of his hands. He will work in you to will and to do, that which he pleases; and he will dispose of you at last, just as he pleases. The glory of his great name, and the good of the universe, require that there should be some vessels of wrath, as well as some vessels of mercy. To promote the greatest good of the whole, it is necessary that some should suffer the vengeance of eternal fire, and that they should be such characters as will render it proper and fit that they should be sent to hell. Perhaps you are of that number. You are now of that character, if you are impenitent sinners. And there is reason to fear that you will continue of that character. You will continue of that character, un-

less God shall change your hearts. And what reason have you to expect he will do this? The general good requires that some should continue of that character, and go away into everlasting punishment; and are not you as likely to be the persons as any? Are you not more likely, since you are already, in a great measure, fitted for destruction? And if God intended to save you, why has he not brought you to repentance before now? If you are of that number, wo is unto you! God will continue you no longer in this world, than till you have completely filled up the measure of your iniquities, and then he will cut you off, and send you to the regions of despair. Your anger and malice, your rebellion and resistance, will be of no avail. Though you rage and strive as much as you will, it will profit you nothing. Though you add to your own, all the malice and all the cunning of the infernal spirits, you will never be able to devise any thing which God will not turn to his own glory, and your everlasting disgrace and confusion. God will make use of you, as his instruments, to accomplish his wise and holy purposes; and when he has done his work with you here, he will put you to the only use for which you are fit, and dispose of you just as we do of a worn out instrument, that is good for nothing but to burn. And while you lie and agonize in the flames of hell, your very curses and blasphemies shall be made to speak his

praise. And while the smoke of your torment ascendeth up forever and ever, the angelic hosts, and ransomed sinners, beholding the glorious perfections of God displayed in your condemnation, will sing, "Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth." AMEN.

