

**A PRACTICAL
DISCOURSE
CONCERNING GOD'S
DECREES
IN TWO PARTS**

*The first concerning man's unfitness to
dispute against the decrees of God, out
of Romans 9:20.*

*The second tending to assert and clear
God's Absolute Election of a limited and
certain number unto eternal life, out of
Acts 13:48.*

By Edward Bagshaw,

a Servant of Jesus Christ.

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Biographical Information

Edward Bagshaw was born at Broughton, Northampton-shire in 1629. He was sent to Oxford from Westminster School, having been elected thence a student of Christ Church in May of 1646, at the age of 17. He had a great reputation in the University as a scholar, and was recommended by the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, John Owen, as Second Master of Westminster School. {Perhaps Owen felt that the Master of the School, Richard Busby, was too much of a Royalist, with the result that the scholars were being educated by a man whose principles were in reality contrary to those of the leaders of the University of Oxford.} Busby and Bagshaw did not get on well together and so the latter was forced to leave Westminster and return to Oxford. In 1659 he was ordained by Ralph Brownrigg, Bishop of Exeter, and became Vicar of Ambrosden, in Oxfordshire; but this only lasted for a short time as well. He once declared his alienage to the Articles of the Church of England, in these words, "First, as to my Faith and Judgment in Points of Doctrine, I do in general firmly believe whatever is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament; and more particularly, that Collection of Articles, which the Church of England hath made; and so far as by the Act of Queen Elizabeth they are enjoined, I am ready to subscribe my real assent unto them; and accordingly I have already, by several Treatises in Print, declare my utter abhorrence of all Popish, Socinian and Arminian tenents which are expressly condemned in those Articles." As will appear from the following treatise, Bagshaw was a staunch opponent to any forms of Free Will Conditionalism; and also a chief antagonist to Richard Baxter, who once criticized Bagshaw as "an Anabaptist, Fifth Monarchy Man, and a Separatist." After the Restoration of King Charles II he was appointed Chaplain to the Earl of Anglesey, but soon after showing himself opposed to the Hierarchy and the Ritualism of the Church of England, he was one of two thousand ministers ejected in 1662 by the Act of Uniformity. Off to Ireland in 1662, he returned to London later that year, at which time he was seized by the High Church Authorities, and was imprisoned for Non-Conformity at the

Gatehouse in Westminster, and soon thereafter removed to the infamous Tower of London. According to Calamy, {Nonconformist's Memorial,} Bagshaw being granted an audience with the King {Charles II} said something so offensive that he was immediately tossed into the Tower Dungeon. After a short release he was then sent to Newgate Prison, where it was long believed that Bagshaw died; but it appears that he was allowed out on parole, and died about 22 weeks later in Tothill Street, Westminster, on December of 1671. He was buried in Bunhill Fields, and Dr. John Owen wrote the following inscription for his tombstone. "Here lies interred, the Body of Mr. Edward Bagshaw, minister of the Gospel, who received faith from God to embrace it, courage to defend it, and patience to suffer for it, which is by most despised and by many persecuted; esteeming the advantage of birth, education, and learning as things of worth to be accounted loss for the knowledge of Christ. From the reproaches of pretended friends, and persecutions of professed adversaries, he took sanctuary, by the will of God, in eternal rest, the 28th December 1671. Here the Wicked cease from troubling, and here the Weary be at rest. Here the Prisoners rest together, they hear not the Voice of the Oppressor."

Dedication

To the Honorable My Lord Bradshaw¹ Lord Chief Justice of Chester.

My Noble Lord, a late author in his several treatises {Mr. Pierce} wherein he endeavors to defend {I will not say the Arminian tenants, because he is unwilling to have them so styled, but, which is all one,} free will and conditional Election, whether because he was touched with compunction for his former errors, as he thinks them, or else to make his present opinions more taking and plausible {as if he had not fell into them by chance, but got them after much serious study} I find that he frequently doth usher them in, by professing that he was once a Calvinist {for that it seems must be the name of obloquie to those, who, according to Scripture, of which Calvin was a good interpreter, that God had yet vouchsafed his church do maintain Absolute predestination} but he was "frightened into his wits" {for he is pleased to play upon himself} by considering the horrible consequences of Absolute Reprobation.

Were I willing to make myself work in this time of my retirement here, by engaging with a Person, who is, as some think very able, {I am sure very confident, and very angry,} I would not desire greater advantage than these few words of his might give me; for to be an Arminian, I mean an asserter of Universal Redemption, and of those other tenents which lead to it or flow from it, a very little pains will serve the turn, as every man is so naturally apt to make himself a sharer with God, and to cozen himself with hopes of mercy, that it is a much harder matter to escape those opinions, than to obtain them. Besides for any to be deferred from the maintenance of any truth,

¹ John Bradshaw {1602 – 1659} was an English judge. He is most notable for his role as President of the Parliamentary Commission for the trial of King Charles I and as the first Lord President of the Council of State of the English Commonwealth. After Charles II was restored to his throne in 1660, the bodies of Bradshaw, Cromwell and Henry Ireton were ordered to be exhumed and displayed in chains all day on the gallows at Tyburn. At sunset, the three bodies that had been displayed publicly were executed posthumously and were beheaded. The bodies were thrown into a common pit and the heads displayed on pikes at Westminster Hall.

because it seems attended with unanswerable difficulties, and many ill consequences, is to my thinking very unreasonable; since if that may be admitted, all the mysterious parts of our Religion which contains the Credenda must never expect either to be entertained or defended. I might add further, that for any to be "frightened into his wits," is a thing altogether unusual; and if it hath indeed in this matter so agitated that gentleman, he is the first who can boast of such an experience.

But, my Lord, I am not desirous to dispute at all in these matters, much less with one, who is so taken up with abusing persons of greater worth, inasmuch that he cannot find leisure to take notice of one so inconsiderable as myself; only intending to handle some part of that question which is now in contest, I must crave leave to profess, that I never yet was satisfied, but that those fatal consequences, whatever they are, which are thought to attend Absolute Reprobation, they do as far as I can see equally accompany God's Prescience, of which yet this gentleman is a zealous asserter. For if God foresees who will refuse the so-called means of grace, he foresees likewise that he will assist one and not another; and that without such particular Divine Assistance, it is impossible that any should believe and be saved. Now what is all this, but for men at long run, after much time misspent in wrangling, to have recourse unto God's Absolute but yet discriminating will and power, which at their first setting out they were desirous to decline.

As for those tragic stories and dreadful nothings, wherewith that gentleman's writings, and before him the Acta Synodalia {Vatican Council} are stuffed, concerning God's cruelty, tyranny and I know not what else; as also the vain and impertinent declaiming from the common places of God's Justice and Mercy, thereby to enervate or at least to inveigh against God's Absolute, Irresistible and Unaccountable Sovereignty. All this terrible talk is nothing but noise and flourish, fit indeed to amuse a country auditory, or to impose upon a lazy and superficial reader; but certainly of very little weight with them who are not frightened from, nor reasoned out of their faith, and who think Scripture truths are to be embraced and followed, in spite of all men's corrupt and empty reasonings against them.

Out of the Scriptures therefore I have undertaken to briefly demonstrate these two things.

First: That whatever opinion is manifestly revealed in Scripture, {such as I take Absolute Reprobation to be,} to argue against it, and by artifices of the human wit, and eloquence to seek to overthrow and disgrace it, this is nothing else but to dispute against God, and impiously to be wise above what is written.

Secondly: That God hath from all eternity designed a particular number unto eternal life, and that this Election is Absolute. From whence it follows, that all those who are not by God in that Eternal Act of Absolute Election appointed to life, they are reprobated, that is, designed for destruction; which decree is Absolute, made by God's sovereign will, and executed in strict justice.

And this my Lord, is the sum of the ensuing treatise, for the publishing of which, next to the care thereof, every Christian should have to see the truths of God, so far as they are revealed to him asserted and freed from cavil, especially in a contradicting, and a very way too quarrelsome Age. I have no one outward motive more prevailing with me, than my, perhaps too great, ambition of presenting something to your lordship, whereby I might testify to the world, not only that real esteem I have of your lordship's singular worth and eminence in general, but likewise to manifest in particular how mindful I am of those many signal and unparalleled marks of favor, which you have been pleased to confer upon myself; for which, though the service of my whole life will be too poor and mean a sacrifice, and no endeavor can amount to deserve the name of requital, yet I could not but think it my duty to study an acknowledgment, which zeal of mine, if your lordship pleases either to accept or pardon, I have attained my end; for I aim at nothing more than the honor of being owned for, My Noble Lord, your lordship's most obliged, most thankful, and most humble devoted servant,

Edward Bagshaw.

Romans 9:20

"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?"

The apostle in this chapter handling that great question, why the Jews, who were, by the apostle's own confession, heirs and children of the promises, should now be omitted and cast off; and the Gentiles, that before were aliens, should now be admitted and taken into the Covenant of Grace in Christ, fixes it upon God's Election; who being a most free Agent chooses one and refuses another, according to his good pleasure, and not out of any foresight of their works, whether good or bad; for Jacob was loved and Esau hated, even before they had done either good or evil. "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to Election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." Rom.9:11.

This doctrine so much detracting from the merit, and thereby abasing the pride of man, the apostle foresaw that this truth would not be easily digested, and therefore he repeats and answers the most obvious of those objections, which were likely upon a rational account to be made against it; and which in short contain of the sum of whatever can be urged in this point.

Of the first objection we find in verse 14, "what shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?" As if the apostle had said, you may object if it be so, that the reason why one man believes and another doth not, and consequently that one man shall be saved and another damned, this only from God's Election, and not from their merit, doth not this argues some unrighteousness in God? A kind of injustice or respect of persons, thus to prefer one man before another? For as all men are equally by nature, so it seems to be most just and reasonable, that they should be equal in condition too, and not this vast difference, as to their final estate, to be put between them, without any desert or merit of the parties.

To this objection thus framed, the apostle returns a double answer. 1. In a phrase of abhorrency, "is there

unrighteousness with God - God forbid;" let not such a thought enter into our hearts, for whatever the issue of God's dealings may be, yet, as to the cause of this, this foundation standeth sure, that God is righteous in all his doings, and will be justified when he is judged. 2. By instancing in the example of Pharaoh, whom God saith, that he raised for this very purpose, to manifest his glory; from whence the apostle concludes, that God "hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth," vs.18, that we are not to look for any outward cause of God's actings, for he is not tied to man's endeavor, since all our good is from him, and therefore can merit nothing at his hands. It is the LORD alone who ordains happiness, and bestows holiness on whom he pleases; they are both free gifts, for we cannot naturally deserve the one, nor are we willing to desire the other. God therefore hardens, as he lets the sinner be a sinner still, for he doth not remove the stone, but let's men perish and go on in their natural hardness; for he is not obliged to his creature, but acts all things, both in mercy or otherwise, according to the dictates of his Absolute, Sovereign and Unaccountable Will.

This answer being so strict and severe, as leaving the greatest part of mankind in a hopeless and irrecoverable condition, it is objected again, vs.19, "thou wilt say then unto me, why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" If it be so, that it is not in him that wills, nor in him that runs, but only in God that shows mercy; then most certainly any action of ours, barely as such, can neither merit Heaven, nor forfeit Hell. Objection, if our wills are tied up so close to the will of God, that like lesser wheels they move only as that Great Mover doth guide them, then why is God so angry with sin and sinners? Why doth he forbid, dehort, and threaten by his prophets? To what end serve all those examples of vengeance, which we tremble to read of? For if it be so with us, we may be miserable, but we cannot be sinful; if our spirits be put into an unsuitable frame, so as that we walk contrary to God, it is our sad necessity and not our fault; since none can alter, much less to resist the will of God, which alone hath made us so.

And now the objection being pressed to such a degree of impiety, that it doth tactilely lay the guilt of all men's transgressions upon the LORD himself, the apostle thinks it high

time to cut off all further arguing, which he doth in these words, vs.20, "nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?" As if he had said, dost thou know who thou art, thou bold inquisitive creature, or who it is you are dealing with? Consider that thou art but a man, and wilt thou question thy Maker's Justice? Forbear thou vain presumptuous man, stand off, and lay thy hand upon thy mouth, for God is in the bush, God is at the bottom of this dispute, and therefore admire with reverence, what thou canst not comprehend with reason.

So that the words are a short, but yet sharp confutation of all carnal reasonings in the matters of God. Such debates are evidenced not only to be sinful, but likewise unreasonable, by a threefold argument lying in these words.

1. The first is taken from the meanness and contemptibleness of the person disputing, and that is man. The apostle brings him in with a "what art thou!" As if he was of so slight a make and value, that he fell under no definition. "What art thou O man!"

2. From the greatness and incomprehensible excellence of the Person disputed against, and that is God - a name able to strike dumb and confound the most exalted person. "What art thou O man that disputes against God!"

3. From the absurd, saucy and malapert manner of carrying on the dispute, for it is not modestly making an objection, or proposing a doubt, but it is a resolved persisting in the cavil, a kind of challenging God to exchange arguments with him. The word is "to answer again and again," never to give over, or as it were to chop logic with God, to seek to nonplus him, and to drive his Almighty Power and Wisdom to an absurdity.

So that here is man, vain man, not disputing but caviling, and that not with his fellow creature but with God. Put all this together and you have empty, ignorant, wretched man, contesting with a Perfect, Wise and Almighty God, and that in such a way too, as if man were the better and the wiser too. Strange folly, madness and impotence is this; and yet whoever gives his reason the reins, and will resolve to dispute when he should obey, must needs be guilty thereof.

The words thus explained and divided may be summed up in this one proposition or doctrine; namely, man, in whatever capacity considered, is not a competent judge of the Equity and Justice of the Proceedings, Ways and Councils of God, in the Dispensing and Ordering of his creatures.

This may be demonstrated in two ways:

1. First, from the quality and nature of the person judging, and that is man.

2. Secondly, from the quality and nature of the things to be judged, and that is of the Ways and Councils of God.

In the first I shall prove that man is not fit to judge, and in the second I shall prove that the Councils of God, neither do nor can fall under man's judgment.

For the first, namely, that man is not fit to judge, it will be clear, if we consider that there are two things, especially requisite to qualify a man to be a judge.

1. Ability or skill. 2. Authority or power. And man completely lacks both in this case.

First, man lacks ability or skill. Vain man, saith Job, "would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt." Job.11:12. Man would still retain his ambitious humor of pretending to know good and evil; he would still exalt himself, and be like God, Gen.3:5, although that very desire hath made him become like the beasts which perish, that is, rash, heady and impertinent; for since our Fall, pride has taken up the place of reason; and arrogance fills that room, which knowledge possessed before. As in a vessel, when water or the more solid substance goes out, presently air comes in.

To take a brief survey of man's weakness and inability, we will consider him in himself, and as he is compared to God.

First, consider man in himself, and then I may ask the question, which our Apostle doth here, "what art thou O man?" Declare us thy original, or discover to us thine excellence, wherein lies thy true worth? From whence comes thy preeminence? Survey thy outside, and tell me what seest thou? A rotten perishing carcass! As our Saviour said of the tombs, how glorious soever they seemed, yet they were but tombs, that is, charnel-houses, {a vault or building where human skeletal remains are stored,} fair on the outside, but full of rottenness within. Matt.23:27. So the most beautiful and spacious outside,

deck it, disguise, trim and adorn it however you will, yet it is still but dust; and you may change and vary its shape, but you cannot change and alter its substance. "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," Gen.3:19, said God to Adam. Was not this a sad story for Adam to hear, when he thought of nothing else, but of being, as the serpent had promised him, "like unto God knowing good and evil." God doth presently undeceive him, by minding him of his original, and telling him what would be the exit of all his borrowed glory. This no doubt did level his thoughts, and lay low those proud imaginations, which otherwise might have seized hold of him and stupefied his senses, since a casket of so mean a value, can scarce be conceived to contain in it a jewel of any excellent price.

I will not, saith the LORD, "always strive with man, for that he also is flesh," Gen.6:3, which may be interpreted, for that he is of the same weak, frail and infirm nature with other creatures. Wherein God seems to make it as an argument of his bearing with man, because man was flesh; and as flesh, unable to bear what God was to lay upon him. But if God draws an argument of compassion from man's frailty, ought not we from thence likewise to draw an argument of submission? If God is pleased to forbear punishing and striving with us, because we are but flesh, ought not we for the same reason much more to forbear judging of, and contending with Him? This use did Abraham make of it; for, "behold," saith he, "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." Gen.18:27. Abraham looks upon it as a boldness, for which he seems to ask pardon, that he undertook so much as to speak to God, since he was but dust and ashes; and how much less do we think for the same reason would he have offered to have disputed with the Almighty?

Secondly, look into man a little nearer, and search his inward and hidden worth; and what is that principle which men ordinarily do so much boast of and magnify? They call it reason; and pray what is reason? Is it not that carnal or fleshly principle in man, which cannot conceive the things of God, and looks upon all the actings of the Holy Spirit as folly! "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." I Cor.2:14. Certainly a small wind will

fill our sail, if such a scant principle of knowledge as this can puff us up; and little cause have we to boast of that, which cost us so dear, and is of such insignificant worth, for in our acquisition of much reason, we lost Paradise; so until we are given Grace to renounce our reason, we can never commence a recovery of that which is of inestimable worth.

But take reason even at its best and highest elevation, as Solomon says, "it is the candle of the Lord," Prov.20:27, and shall the candle say to the Sun, thou hast no light in thee? Shall our faint, glimmering and derivative lustre, prefer or oppose itself to the Fountain, from which it issued? "There is a spirit in man," saith Job, but "the inspiration of the Almighty giveth it understanding." Job 32:8. And do we think that the LORD gave it for these purposes, to argue and dispute his wonderful works and his doings which are altogether marvelous beyond our grasp? So much to abuse and mis-employ our talent is certainly a greater sin, and will bring down a greater punishment, than barely not to use it.

In short, man's reason at its best and utmost extent is a narrow, shrunken and limited thing, and in spiritual matters altogether blind and perverse. In natural things either ignorant, or only changing ignorance into uncertainty; and shall a man so much stretch this principle, as by it to condemn his Maker? Shall we with this scant understanding measure Infinity; or set ourselves as judges in the highest administrations of Providence, who cannot demonstrably prove the motion of the smallest atom? What is this but to darken "counsel by words without knowledge," Job 38:2, to put a false comment upon a clear text, and to blur the beauty of Divine Providence with our perverse and shortsighted interpretations.

Secondly, man's inability doth yet further appear, if you consider him as compared to God. It is not for nothing here that the Apostle doth put forth this question, "who art thou O man that repliest against God, Rom.9:20, but he does it thereby to aggravate the sinful presumption of the disputer, for it was against God himself, and therefore all the more hideous. And indeed a man can never know his own weakness and imperfection aright, until he has lost himself in contemplating the vast abyss and ocean of God's Infinite Perfection. For when we would exactly know whether a thing be little or not, we do

not usually set it by something that is less, but to compare it to something greater, as a spark to a flame, a drop to the ocean, and the like. So in this case, while a man centers in himself, and draws all his lines inward, he may perhaps please himself with some thoughts of self-sufficiency, but when he once goes out of himself, and takes a strict view of the amazing Greatness and Majesty, which God discovers even in his works of Providence, then doth a man presently begin to perceive his own emptiness and nothingness. For suppose a man were kept up close imprisoned in a dungeon all his days, and if after some time of durance there in that horror and darkness, he should by chance have a little glimpse of light set into him by a small cranny, how infinitely would he be delighted and pleased therewith; but if afterwards he were taken from thence, and by degrees fitted to endure, and then placed in full sunshine, how strangely would he loathe his former place of restraint and bondage? It is just so with a man, who by degrees is taken off from himself, and prepared to a gracious discovery of God's Excellence. "When I consider," saith the psalmist, "thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained," it follows presently, "what is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Psal.8:3-4. As permitted to look upon God in the Glory and Brightness of his Appearance, for then and only then all conceits of human excellence will presently vanish as stars do disappear at noonday.

Certain it is, that if men were more frequent and serious in the contemplating of God's Power and Wisdom, they would not be so taken up with thoughts of their own; for a lack of comparing our own emptiness to God's fullness is the only thing that doth most puff us up and swell us. A pregnant instance of this may be seen in the case of Job; for he finding himself under a great affliction, and feeling, as he thought, hard measure from God, grows impatient and seems to long for nothing more than that he might dispute with God; thinking no doubt but that he had so much to say in his own behalf, as would position even God himself to answer. Hence are those passionate expressions of his, "Oh that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour," 16:21, and, "Oh that I knew where I might find him; that I might come even to his seat! I would

order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments," Job 23:3-4, that is, I would dispute and argue the case with Him. His friends dissuade him from this attempt all that they can, for they tell him over and over, that he forgets himself in turning his own spirit against God, and in letting such words go out of his mouth. Job 15:13. And when that would not take him off, Elihu undertakes to answer on God's behalf, and urges against him, that God is greater than man, and gives no account of his matters. Job 33:13. That his Councils are unsearchable, for touching the Almighty who can know him, or search him out unto perfection. Job 37:23. With many other arguments to the same purpose, yet still Job remains unsatisfied, and nothing but disputing with God himself will contend him. Well at last God doth condescend to answer his curiosity, and what is the issue? When once God doth mind him of his Power, that all we see or feel is only an effect and product of his Goodness; when even the most common and ordinary phenomena of nature, viz., hail, snow, rain, &c., are evidenced to be beyond the reach of man's reason to comprehend, then Job presently alters his note, for he is not now for disputing any longer, but sinks into a humble acknowledgment. "Behold, I am vile," saith he, "what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." Job 40:4. A dejected sense of our own vileness is most likely to be the result of comparing ourselves to God's Excellence.

Thus man lacks ability to judge; and as man lacks ability, so likewise he lacks authority, which is the special requisite to constitute a judge. When one came to our Saviour, though he had all power in him, yet acting as Man, he refused to meddle, and asks the question, "who made me a judge or a divider over you?" Lk.12:14. So I ask thee, thou bold disputer, whoever thou art, who made thee a judge, and by what authority dost thou argue these things? If thou hast no warrant, nothing in the Word of God to show or to justify thy confidence, thou art not only a rash and ignorant censurer, but an impotent intruder! I find in Scripture that murmuring is reprov'd, disputing forbidden, and nothing but obedience required. Wilt thou then upon no better a ground, than because thou art unsatisfied with the justice or the reasonableness of such and such a proceeding, take upon thee to fathom the depths of God, and to call him to thy tribunal? What? Shall the Judge of all the

Earth be now arraigned at thy bar, and give thee an account of his Matters? Or else, wilt thou charge him with folly, injustice or cruelty, or with other things, which I tremble to think of! How comes this about, let us know when God parted with his Prerogative, and made you his overseer?

The apostle James commanding those to whom he writes, not to speak evil one of another, Jas.4:11, gives this reason for it, because thereby they should judge the Law, which forbids all uncharitable backbiting. "But," saith he, "if thou judge the Law, thou art not a doer of the Law, but a judge," or that is to say, thou art a thing which God never intended thee, for he gives his Law to be a rule of thy obedience, and not a subject of thy reasonings. So say I here, if any takes upon him to judge God's proceedings; that is, if thou weighest his ways in thy balance, if you measure him by thy line, if you do limit and circumscribe him by your compass, and so proceed to pass sentence upon him, in this case thou art no longer a servant of the Lord, but a judge; and then you may expect and fear what will follow; for if so many perished at one time barely for looking into the ark of the Covenant; and if he that judges another, though his fellow creature, is threatened to be judged himself, how much sorer punishment, how much severer judgment shall he expect, who thus provokes the Lord by judging, censoring and even condemning Him?

So much for the first reason, that man is not in any capacity fit to judge.

The second reason is taken from the nature and quality of the things that are judged, for they are the ways, councils and proceedings of God, and so cannot fall under man's judgment whatsoever. Thus the apostle doth argue, "for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." I Cor.2:11. Shall God be God, and not have peculiar ways and methods of acting, not to be fathomed or understood by man? He himself hath told us to check our search, that his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isa.55:8-9. The LORD is

not tied to our narrow definitions of just and unjust, for these are words only that bind us, but can lay no constraint upon him, who acts, like himself, in a Sovereign and Unlimited manner. Now, as in an engine, if we do not see the springs and wheels that move it, it is impossible that we should know how or which way it will turn; so since we cannot discern or discover the principle upon which the Great Mover and Disposer of all things acts, this being locked up and hid in the cabinet of his own will, to which only his Son and Spirit have a key; and therefore we have nothing to do but to submit in silence. "Whatever God doth," saith the preacher, however it may appear outwardly deformed or misshapen, yet nothing can be added to it or taken from it, for it hath in itself an Entire and Absolute Perfection; and the reason why God doth sometimes bring strange and perplexing things to pass, is it, that men might dispute and be brought to confusion; no, but rather that they might fall down on their faces before Him. "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever; nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it; and God doeth it, that men should fear before him." Eccles.3:14.

The use is, if it be so, that no man is a competent judge of the Equity and Justice of God's proceedings; and therefore it should teach us to silence our vain reasonings in the matters of God, looking upon them as mysteries beyond our reach, and therefore infinitely above our cavil. Perhaps this is not a rational, and I'm sure it is not a Christian way of arguing, *non intelligo, ergo non credo*; that is, I do not understand, and so therefore I do not believe. Because I do not understand, I cannot perceive how such or such a point can be made out by reason, or can consist with those conclusions which I have embraced, therefore I will not believe it. It is the task, and it should be the triumph of faith, to break through all such difficulties, and to remove even mountains of seeming contradictions. The apostle calls faith our victory, by which we overcome the world, I Jn.5:4, and if faith overcomes the world, how much more ought it to overcome our doubts, and our reasonings, which are but as it were the clouds and misty part of the world. When our Saviour had discoursed concerning that great Mystery of living and feeding upon him by faith, the apostles presently cried out, "this is an hard saying; who can hear it?" Jn.6:60. This is so absurd

and irrational that there is no enduring it. Our Saviour perceiving how they staggered, he doth gently acquaint them with the reason of their erroneous apprehension, viz., because they judged according to the flesh and human appearance, "it is the Spirit" saith he "that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Jn.6:63.

To apply this, doth any dealing of God put thee into an anxious and disputing state, by all means suspend thy censure, lest thou shouldest charge God foolishly, and search first into the principle by which thou proceedest, whether it be flesh or spirit; for reason itself, till it be purged, till the dregs be taken off and refined by the Spirit of God, is still but flesh, a weak, low and carnal principle, not at all fit for a Christian to own; but is indeed one of those earthly members, which we are commanded to subdue and mortify. Col.3:5. To distrust our own understandings, not to pass sentence upon the first blush and offer of things, nor in spiritual concernments to be led by human appearance, this is the first and most necessary part of self-denial.

This use may be improved in many particulars, but there are two things I mainly intend it for.

First, to fix and settle our spirits in that great and so much controverted doctrine, concerning God's Decree of Eternal Election and Reprobation.

Secondly, to suppress in silence our murmurings and repinings against God, in Acts of Providence and every Dispensation ordered on our behalf.

First, the consideration of man's unfitness in judging the matters of God, ought to settle and fix us in the doctrine of Election and Reprobation. That God hath from all eternity chosen some, on whom he will have mercy; and hath, out of his own sheer good pleasure, reprobated others, is clear from this and many other places of Holy Scripture; but to reconcile this to human reason, or to satisfy all the objections which may be brought from philosophy against it, I think the Apostle himself did not pretend to do. Here in this verse, he seems to imply, that the best way to decide this controversy, is not to dispute it, and in another place, when in a kind of ecstasy he cries out, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of

God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Rom.11:33. Certainly he did thereby intend to put a stop unto our inquiry, that we might not venture into a depth, which we could not fathom.

What is said by all sides in this dispute, I have often, as far as my weakness would give me leave, considered, but yet could never find satisfaction in anything, but in that question of the Apostle, and in bringing my reason to a state of utter perplexity.

For however the Arminians pretend that the doctrine of Absolute Predestination is blasphemous, and I know not what, because it seems to make God the Author of Sin; yet indeed it doth no more do it, if it be well weighed, than their doctrine of Prescience doth; for which reason, Socinius, who very well understood the controversy, did not fear to deny even Prescience itself; since whatever is infallibly foreknown, must infallibly come to pass, that is necessary; for to distinguish between the necessity of the event and the necessity of that which causes the event, is, I confess a subtlety that I understand not, and am hopeless ever to be satisfied in.

Leaving therefore the distributors of this age to the merciless fury of one another's pens, I shall give some few practical rules, whereby whoever guides himself, will be freed from all those perplexities which his reason otherwise would engage him in.

First, in all doubts never inquire as what is rational, but what is revealed; the Word of God alone, which is the ground of our Faith, and which ought to be the object of our search. If you find this doctrine, that God hath prepared some, even for everlasting destruction, even whilst he hath compassion on others, and that merely to manifest his own Glory; if this doctrine be plainly laid down before thee, then farewell reason, and by faith enquire, whether your standing be in Christ or no; be erected upon the sacred Oracle, or no? "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." I Cor.3:11. For there are Saved and Lost, whose condition is as sure and irreversible as if they were in possession of it already.

Secondly, let no doubts or perplexities take you off from your path of obedience. As no man needs fear to embrace Gospel Truth upon its own terms, so neither ought he by any

consequences of vain and carnal reasoning to be withdrawn from the performance of his duty. He that finds in himself such a frame, that he is resolved to go on, and leave the issue to God, {though he perish,} yet trust he still, for a confidence in the Lord he cannot escape, and faith in Christ he cannot quench, for he will find at last all his darkness and doubtings cleared up and scattered, for then we believe indeed, when with Abraham we act even against and beyond all human probability.

Thirdly, be often asking yourselves this question with the Apostle, who am I that I should limit the Almighty or judge the Holy One of Israel? What are we, poor dust and ashes, that we should look up to God except it be with trembling and amazement, to admire and not to dispute his doings? For what are we, that we should be prescribing rules to him, and finding out new ways and methods of salvation, other than God himself hath been pleased to discover? What are we that we should sit upon the Decrees of God, and stain the wisdom of his councils, with the dirt and mire of our own fancies? This impartial self-examination will serve to cure or at least to allay our curiosity.

Lastly, in all disputes and doubts, ever think that part of our tenent safest, which and doth least humor man's pride, and doth most advance God's Glory; for we cannot think too meanly and humbly of ourselves, nor can we too much advance and exalt God's Sovereignty. 'Tis this on which the Justice of all God's proceedings is grounded; may God be Great and Glorious, though every man be miserable. To make God all in all, besides being our duty, is likewise nothing else but an anticipation of future blessedness, and is by the Apostle recorded to be the blessed posture of our future state. "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." I Cor.15:28.

Secondly, the consideration of our incompetence to judge the equity of God's proceedings, serves to suppress and moderate all repinings at the Providence of God in his outward dispensations. No one thing is so great an inducement to atheism and a direct denial of God, as to distrust the Wisdom and Equity of his Providence. David confesseth that the temptation arising from hence did so far prevail upon him, that his feet were almost gone, and his steps had well-nigh slipped,

Psal.73:2, that is, he was just then sliding, even almost going into some erroneous and blasphemous conceit about this matter. The temptation was taken from the prosperity of the wicked, "for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Why the wicked seem to prosper has been a question that hath much puzzled the unbelieving world, and some of their heathen stoics have many excellent sayings about it, but to speak the truth, they seem to be only utterings of wit, rather than of serious judgment; for this is certain, that whoever sticks long upon this question, cannot be guiltless; since reason cannot resolve it, "when I sought to know this," saith David, "it was too painful for me." Psal.73:16. I did endeavor to debate and argue the case by my own reason, and from thence to answer my scruples, but I could not do it, the objection did still prevail and overmaster me. What did David then? We find that he went into the sanctuary of God, vs.17, he consulted the Oracle, and there he found the reason of their advancement; and then he concludes that discourse, with taxing himself of great folly, for not taking this course sooner, but giving so much scope and latitude to his corrupt reasoning, "so foolish was I, and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee." Psal.73:22.

That which was David's practice ought to be ours, when we are set upon with the same temptation, for we have lived to see as great variety of strange providences as any Nation under Heaven; nor is the reason of this as yet revealed, for we cannot spell out God's meaning, but certainly he has a great work going, which will in due time be accomplished.

So likewise in all particular events which concern us, as believers in Christ, let us not so much consider and reflect upon the things we see and feel, as upon the Divine Hand of Providential Grace and Mercy which sent them. This will either ease our burdens, or at least make us bear them with more cheerfulness if we consider that God laid them on, whose Power we cannot resist, and whose Wisdom we ought never to question.

Let us stop our empty chatter, and quiet our discontents with this, that God is in the cloud, that he works all things not according to his will barely, though that would be enough in itself, but according to the Counsel of his Will. There is a holy

Wisdom and beautiful Design in everything though we cannot reach it.

Many impatient Jonah's there are in the world who think it becomes them to quarrel and contest with God, though they have but lost their gourd, Jon.4:6-10, whose spirit is like a troubled sea, for any small wind will raise a storm and beget a tempest in them.

Let all such hearken to that advice of Hannah, "talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth, for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed," I Sam.2:3, and not actions only, but events likewise; there are no such things as rash, casual and unpremeditated events, but that part of the scale, which falls to our lot, whether for good or bad, comes only, because God is so pleased to order and turn the balance. "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, where is now their God? But our God is in the Heavens; he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." Psal.115:1-3.

Acts 13:48

"And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

The Apostle Paul having in a large discourse deduced Christian Religion from its very original, and showed, how in the several ages of the world, God still carried on the same design for the salvation of men by Jesus Christ, as he that was not only foretold, but figured in all their legal worship; you find, Acts 13:45, the Jews contradicting and blaspheming, either railing on Christ or else reviling Paul, and ignoramusly fighting and traducing the Doctrine which he had delivered.

Whereupon the Apostle speaking freely or plainly tells them that the loss and damage by so doing would only rebound to themselves, for hereby, that is, by refusing the promise set forth of Salvation by Christ, they evidenced that they judged themselves unworthy so great a mercy, and therefore they being, as it were men self-condemned, he would have no more to do with them, but from thence forward publish the Doctrine of the Gospel to the Gentiles, intimating that God till then had kept his church, and confined it to the narrow circuit of Judea, thereby as it were imprisoning that glorious light in a lantern; but now God would resume his entire right, that the earth might be the Lord's and the fullness thereof, excluding no place, restraining no people from the benefit and comfort which would flow from the light of the Gospel streaming in and shining amongst them.

Whereupon it follows, vs.48, "when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

From the words I intend to insist upon and clear two propositions.

First, that there are some, and that a definite and limited number, which are by God from all eternity ordained unto Eternal Life or Salvation.

Secondly, that the reason why one man believes, embraces the Gospel of Salvation, and another doth not, is finally to be resolved unto God's Eternal Election of the one and God's Reprobation or Rejection of the other.

Both these doctrines are clear from the words of the text, for this phrase, "as many as were ordained believed," implies, first that some certain persons were ordained, whereby they are distinguished from the rest of the common hearers; and likewise it is added as a reason, why these believed, while the others continued in their impenitence, is that they were ordained and therefore they believed.

Before I prove the first proposition, that there are some and that a certain number appointed unto life, which I think is evident in the text, I must not omit that this word "ordained" hath been variously rendered, and many attempts have been made to draw it from its true and native signification. The sum of what they say is briefly that this ordination signifies a disposition and qualification for the Gospel; so that those "ordained" according to them, are not ordained by God, but such as ordain themselves. Thus Socinus², Grotius³, and his chief interpreter Dr. Hammond⁴ set forth.

That these men who do obviously serve an agenda and are unwilling to own anything more in Religion than that which they can reconcile to reason, should thus strangely, {I will not say ignorantly, for it is too much learning that causes this madness,} but contrary to all rules of grammar and the analogy of the Greek tongue, make a passive verb signify activity, is to me no great a wonder; for if they did not this, they would lose their cause, and then what would become of their reputation with their deluded followers; which, whatever becomes of the truth, must be secured; so impossible is it to drive on those two

² Faustus Socinus, 1539-1604, Italian theologian and founder of the school of thought known as Socinianism, notorious for its non-trinitarian Christology, but also the assertion of free-will.

³ Hugo Grotius, 1583-1645, philosopher, theologian, apologist, historiographer, statesman, diplomat, &c., but more essentially Grotius sided against God's Predestinating Grace in Christ, and took up the Arminian cause of free will. His contributions to Arminian theology provided the seeds for later Arminian-based movements, such as Methodism, &c, and he is acknowledged as a significant figure in the Arminianism-Calvinism debate.

⁴ Hammond, Henry, 1605-1660; Church of England; a pioneer Anglican theologian, much influenced by Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes, but also by that form of Arminianism as found in Hugo Grotius, whom he defended in his writings.

contrary trades of subjection to the truth of Holy Scripture and human applause.

But since the learned and ingenuous Mr. Mede⁵ suffered himself to be so far gone in his criticisms, as to render this word to imply such who are in a posture to lay hold upon, and candidate themselves to eternal life; so that the word in the original be not ordained, but ordered, in rank-and-file as it were, marshaled and embattled unto eternal life. This is a conceit so strained, so unsuitable to Scripture language, and withal so much unbecoming the learning of that worthy man, that I cannot pass it over without observing these two things.

That it is a very hard matter for the soberest and best tempered believers, such as I would hope Mr. Mede to have been, to captivate their reason and to subdue their learning unto the plainness and simplicity of the Gospel.

That there is great need for all those who are students in Divinity, and who design themselves for that honorable, and never enough valued profession of preaching the Gospel, that they make themselves worthy of it, as by all other excellencies, so especially by careful and diligent search of the Scriptures in their original languages; and that, not only because he ought not to prophesy who knows not how to interpret, but lest men who pretend to skill and exactness in those tongues, do abuse our ignorance to an embracing of their errors, while we are not able to distinguish between a true text and a bad comment. For I do not see how we can rationally refuse any interpretation though false, if we are not able knowingly to make out a better of our own.

But for the clearing of this text very little skill will serve, for who knows not, that knows anything of Greek that the word rendered "ordained" was never yet taken actively, and that the word cannot be otherwise rendered here, than it is everywhere else, that is, ordained or appointed. Thus, Rom.13:1, "the

⁵ Mede, Joseph, 1586-1639, Biblical scholar educated at Christ's College, and Professor of Greek at Cambridge University. His major work was his *Clavis Apocalypticae*, {which set forth the structural outline of the Book of Revelation,} written in Latin {1627} and translated into English, {*Key of the Revelation Searched and Demonstrated*,} in 1643, to which William Twisse, {chairperson of the Westminster Assembly,} added a preface, thus generally endorsing the work.

powers that be are ordained of God," - appointed of God. And, Acts 17:26, God "hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation," - God hath bound or limited the fore-appointed seasons, that is, God hath set a fixed and certain period unto the duration of those several changes and scenes of time, which he himself hath preordained; so in this place, Acts 13:48, the meaning is that those that are by God certainly and infallibly appointed unto eternal life are at the appointed time given faith to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. God being not only the Disposer of seasons but of persons.

These are they who by the Apostle Paul are designated as those who are "called" and "saved" already, that is, those whose Salvation is as sure and certain, as if they were already put into the full possession thereof. "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." II Tim.1:9.

In other places they are considered as foreordained or predestinated to Grace and Glory, and that we might not doubt, what it was that gave the birth and rise to such a Gracious Appointment, the Apostle adds that it was according to the purpose of him who doth not wait for nor depend upon outward motives, but works all things according to the counsel of his own will. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Eph.1:5.

In Romans, they are called, "the Election of Grace," Rom.11:5, that is, such persons of whose Election Grace only was the Cause, and simply, "the Election," vs.7, that is, those whom God hath called and chosen out from the rest of mankind and designated for everlasting blessedness.

The force of these and many other texts of Scripture to the same purpose make all sides agree; and to uselessly imagine that some indeed are appointed unto life, but who these are, even God himself doth not know, so Socinus, that though some are appointed, yet there is a possibility for all, as thinks Arminius; that is in short, that some shall be saved is certain, but that the persons in their number is unlimited and uncertain is utterly contemptible!

Before therefore I prove the point by Scripture, give me leave to bewail a little the sad condition of those men who take a liberty to interpret revealed Truth by rational notions; for in so doing, through a just Judgment of God upon their curiosity, they are forced to run into and maintain those fond and ridiculous errors which a sober man would blush to own!

As in this case, can it be imaginable that God should design any of his creatures unto eternal life, and yet not know who they are, as Socinus affirms, who brings in God, as Plato did of old, not choosing of persons, but propositions; not designing this or that man to Salvation, and so to Faith absolutely by virtue of his prerogative, but only to Salvation indefinitely upon supposition of faith, which whether any will embrace or not, he doth not fear to assert that God himself doth not know. So careless are men of God's honor, while they study and contend for their own. For if the case be so indeed, God doth only leave himself in the dark, but doth not exercise his Power and Prescience about his noblest creature, Man.

The doctrine of the Universal Redemption, though not so barefaced, yet labors with the same absurdity; for if God knows who shall be saved, then it is absolutely certain there is no possibility for all, or else we must conclude God's knowledge to be only guesswork, and maintain a too apparent contradiction; for if God knows who shall be saved, then it is evident that these only shall be saved, who are so known; whereas if there be a possibility left for all, then it is certain, that God did not infallibly know who they were that should be saved, but left the whole to hazard.

I must confess I do not willingly desire to deal this way in reproving any error, for had I less to say in reason than I have, for God's Eternal Absolute Election, yet the Scripture being so full and positive therein, to that alone I would resign and surrender my faith, and not willingly suffer myself to partake either of their fate, or of their folly, who cannot endure to be taught, but in spiritual, and therefore Inconceivable things, would fain be wise above what is written.

For that there is a set and limited number appointed to Salvation in Christ, appears from Scripture, and that God is said, to know them that are his, II Tim.2:19, that is, not their natures only, but their names as well, for therefore our Saviour,

Lk.10:20, bids his apostles to rejoice in that their names were written in Heaven, put into God's muster roll and catalog of eternity, from whence they could never be blotted out.

"Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world," Acts 15:18, that is, so known as to be disposed and ordered by him; nay therefore known, because ordered, for so to distinguish between God's knowledge and his power as in his actions to separate one from the other, is to speak neither sense nor Scripture; for God foreknew them, all of them and only them; not in their qualifications, but in their respective persons, did he predestinate them to be conformed to the image of his Son. Rom.8:29. And if of an elect Person, all the hairs are numbered, Matt.10:30, how much more of Christ's Mystical Body, are all the members numbered; which Body is already complete as to God's purpose concerning it, and to imagine that they shall fill a place there, whom God doth not already know as particularly, as if they were actually existing, is to measure eternity by time and to make God like ourselves frail and fallible.

The reason of this is because every act of God is Absolute, for as his Nature is, so are the actions which flow from it, Unconditional and Irrespective.

For the clearing of which reason, it will be necessary to explain in the Act of Election, how God, who elects; and how man, who is elected, are to be considered.

For the first, many there be that think God in the Act of Election is to be considered as a Judge, and hence argue against this Absolute and Irrespective Election from those known and obvious places of Scripture. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Gen.18:25. "For there is no respect of persons with God." Rom.2:11. "Is God unrighteous?" Rom.3:5. Will God prefer one before another, when all are equal? How is this reconcilable to his Justice? I answer: 1. That in the Act of Election, God is not to be considered as a judge, because; a judge as a judge is tied to a rule, which he may not transgress, but what rule can be imagined to tie God, except what he hath set himself; which in the Act of Election, that being eternal, and flowing only from the will of God, cannot rationally be supposed. 2. The business of a judge, as a judge, is to bestow rewards and punishments according to merit, but in Election the motive only on God's part is Grace, and the end is his Glory. 3. God is not at

all obliged to man; he that made man, may freely appoint him to whatsoever ends he pleases, without consulting him or without doing him any injury whatsoever, "hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonor?" Rom.9:21. Though for a man to plead with God in this case is somewhat a worse blunder, than for clay to quarrel with the potter; since there matter strives only with its fashioner, but here nothing contends with its Maker. There the clay though it be not a vessel of honor, yet remains clay still, but here not the quality only, but the substance likewise is subject to the pleasure of its Heavenly Architect. Lastly, the Apostle, setting out to give a reason of his difference between one man and another, ascribes it altogether to God's good pleasure, and for a proof of that assertion he alleges a saying of God himself, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Rom.9:15.

So that the Act of God in choosing some to everlasting life, and refusing others is not an Act of Justice, for they neither did nor could deserve it, nor is it properly an Act of Mercy, for that any should be saved at all was merely from Mercy, but that these rather than others, was not properly from Mercy, because Mercy is equal to all that equally deserve it, or equally stand in need thereof, but here between equals a distinction is made. Election therefore is an Act of Sovereign Grace, the Apostle calls it, "the good pleasure of God's will," Eph.1:5, which as none can resist, so none ought to question; for neither is man stronger than God, nor ought he to think himself wiser. Thus God in the Act of Election is not to be considered as a Judge, but as a Sovereign.

For the second, namely, how the persons, who are elected, are to be considered; some affirm that they are to be looked upon as believers; namely, that God foreseeing that some would embrace Faith and Salvation when it was offered them, he did therefore choose some unto everlasting life; and this conceit is not only maintained by our modern Arminians, but, that I may not seem to mince the matter, was in general the opinion of almost all the Greek and Latin Fathers, except only Augustine of the primitive and purer times. They who have read them, will affirm as much, and they who doubt may read

their sayings to this purpose, faithfully collected by Vossius in his *Historia Pelagiana*⁶.

But this supposition however plausible {as indeed what is not, that gives man a power} and though backed with so much authority, yet seems to me to be directly contrary both to Reason and Scripture.

First to reason, because this puts something as a cause to move God's will; for if faith foreseen in a man were the cause why God chose him, then something without God shall have an influence upon him, which certainly is very abused, if not blasphemous; for if God shall be supposed to take a reason of his Actings from something outside himself, that thing must needs alter him, and consequently be great greater than him.

Secondly, because this very faith thus foreseen is the gift of God, as the Apostle affirms, Eph.2:8, and none that I know deny it; so that if faith foreseen were the cause of choosing any, the Decree of God must thus be ordered, I foresee that I will give such a one faith, therefore I decree that I will save him, that is, I decree to give the means, before I have yet appointed the end, which is a method of marshaling God's Decrees, that a knowing heathen would be ashamed to think of.

More might be urged, but I hasten to Scripture confutation, for we find our Saviour says of his disciples {which who sees not how applicable it is to all the elect} that he chose them, and that they had not chosen him, Jn.15:16, but if faith foreseen were a cause, he must have said the clean contrary, for then he would've chosen them, because they had first chose him.

And the Apostle says, I Jn.4:10, "not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," not as foreseeing our affection, but as pursuing the intent, and procuring in us the effects of his own love.

And the Apostle Paul doth everywhere assert faith to be a fruit and not a cause of Election, that we are chosen unto good works, not for them, that is that they who are predestinated

⁶ Reference is to the work by Gerardus Vossius, in 1618, entitled, *Historia de controversiis quas Pelagius eiusque reliquiae moverunt* or a History of the Pelagian Controversies; which, when it was written, was considered by some to favour the views of the Arminians or Remonstrants.

shall certainly believe, not they who believe were therefore predestinated, which is the sum of his discourse in Ephesians chapter 1.

So that in the Act of Election, men are to be considered as merely passive, that is, as recipients, not as believers, as such who were liable to be disposed by God how he pleased, but had no possibility of meriting anything from him.

This is affirmed of the Israelites in general, that God chose them, not because they were better, or more righteous than other people, but because he set his heart upon them. "For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God; the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers." Deut.7:6-8. And lest they should perhaps pride themselves with a conceit, that for their own worth and excellence this privilege was given them, they are expressly told that there was no such matter, for they were a stiff-necked and rebellious people, Deut.9:6, able rather to thwart, and if possible, to undo God's Election, than to procure it.

Thus we find that Christ preached the Gospel to Bethsaida, and to them of Capernaum, who were so far from meriting, that our Saviour affirms of them, Matt.11:21-23, that Sodom and Gomorrah had they enjoyed the like favor, would have been more repentant than they.

And to conclude in particulars, the Apostle Paul handling the very argument, and intending forever, so far as Scripture evidence will reach, to silence the disputer of this world, that God alone may have the glory of his Grace, he instances in Jacob, who was by virtue of this Absolute Election preferred before Esau {the temporal condition serving to shadow out the eternal} for lest any imagination should arise, as if Jacob in himself were the more deserving of the two, he says it was done before any of them had done either good or evil. And if it should be asked, how it came to pass that one was taken, and the other left; what did induce God to put such a difference between two, who are morally equal, and naturally Esau was to have the

advantage, the Apostle adds, that it was done to this end, that "the purpose of God according to Election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." Rom.9:11. Wherein the Apostle pleading the cause of God's Honor, and being jealous of his prerogative, resolves all things into God's Purpose, and refers us thither to seek the ultimate difference of a man's either temporal or eternal condition. And he that will not acquiesce, when he thus finds it written, but will bring his wit to strive and wrestle against the will of God, he cannot alter that, but only does unhappily evidence to himself, that while he continues in that unbelieving strain of rebellion against the Lord's Christ and against the express testimony of holy Scripture, he is not of the number of God's elect, for all that are, are a people brought under the subjection of all that which is written, and made willing, Psal.110:3, in the day of God's power exerted on their behalf to believe the Gospel.

Against this which hath been urged, there is that I know of but one considerable objection; that is, if the number of those which shall be saved be limited and certain, so that there is no possibility for more, how comes it to pass that the Prophets and Apostles, are so importunate, with all indifferently to come in, and repent, that they might be saved; and God himself is so often brought in Scripture chiding and expostulating with sinners for destroying themselves, and for refusing Salvation; which seems to be a vain and ludicrous thing, if the number be so set already, that there is no room for more.

This objection is yet made more tragical, by the many heavy charges and indictments which are drawn up against this, as some style it, partial and cruel dealing from the common places of God's Justice and Mercy, which men who love themselves are very willing to enlarge, and therefore easily hearken to those who dare declaim upon such subjects; but these vain and empty flourishes, however insoluble they may seem to some, who are guided by the first impression and sound of words, are of no importance, if we fix Election only upon God's will; for this will presently cut off all witty cavils, if we can prove that God will indeed have it so; and therefore I look upon the former objection as their main strength, because it immediately tends to practice, and seems to beget this opinion, that God's

Secret and Revealed Will do thwart and contradict each other. Therefore I answer.

1. That though few shall be saved, and those few determined, yet because they are unknown to us, we are to look upon all as in a savable condition. Thus the Prophets and Apostles did in their so frequent and repeated instances with those to whom they preached, and their example we are to follow; for peremptorily to conclude against any, and to deny them the Gospel of Salvation, because they are not elected, is an uncharitable presumption in us, which we shall more heavily account for, than they will do for their disobedience and unbelief.

2. There is no other way for those who are elected to come to the knowledge of the truth, but by a general proclamation of it indifferently to all, which is our Saviour's meaning in those many parables, which intimate a promiscuous call, from whence he concludes, that though many are called, yet few are chosen, Matt.22:14, and we may invert the proposition thus, though few are chosen, yet many must be called. In this world the Tares and the Wheat must be equally tended, and though they grow together with some discernible difference, yet it is not the business of a minister to make a final separation.

Lastly, there is a twofold end in preaching the Gospel, the first and principal is to bring in God's elect, but secondly it serves to condemn the reprobate, and to make their damnation just. For what can they plead at the last day to justify their unbelief, since they were called as it were by name, yet they willingly exclude themselves, and thereby as the Apostle says of the Jews here, Acts 13:46, judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. Thus the Apostle says that God's Divinity and Spiritual Being was discovered in the Creation; and if it was asked to what purpose, since so few did either believe or worship the LORD as they ought, he answers, that it was for this end, Rom.1:20, that they might have nothing to plead, no quirk nor apology left to excuse their Atheism and Idolatry. And "if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost," II Cor.4:4, discovered to them, but hid to them, because they treat the Scripture in a contemptible manner, and often do not take pains, as they should, Acts 17:11, to search out its inward and spiritual

meaning. "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" Jn.3:12.

So we are, saith he, "unto God a sweet savour of Christ," both to them that are saved, and to them that perish. "Thanks be unto God," who "maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish; to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life." II Cor.2:14-16. We as ambassadors of Christ, perform that good and acceptable service unto God, when we preach the Word, whether it serves to save or to condemn; for in the one God's Mercy, and in the other God's Justice is manifested. Those that enter therein will find mercy, for thereto they were appointed, those that stand out, shall be sure of justice, because when they were summoned as well as others, yet they would not, because they would not. They did voluntarily condemn the Word of Life, and therefore can blame none but themselves, if at last they find it a Word of Death.

If any think this harsh and severe, I cannot deny but it is so, and thus the Apostle thought it, when he says, that God herein did manifest his Anger as well as his Power. "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." Rom.9:22-23. Nay, he goes somewhat further, and speaking of the same Decree, Rom.11:22, he calls it, the extreme rigor and sharp severity of God, but from thence he doth not take occasion to inveigh against it, as our bold and blasphemous disputer's do, but concludes as it were in a rapture, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Rom.11:33.

As for those expressions wherein God is said to declare his willingness that all should be saved, {as I Tim.2:4, &c.,} they may either be interpreted of God's will as declared by the preachers thereof, which is indefinite to all that believe and repent; or else, they may be understood and spoken after the manner of men, in the same sense that God is said to have eyes

and ears, and other bodily parts, whereby he is pleased to render himself intelligible by us. For if God did indeed will the Salvation of all, then it is certain that all would be saved, for God can do whatever he wills; but since it is manifest that all are not saved, it is evident likewise that God did not will all should be saved, for who hath resisted his will? Rom.9:19.

As for that kind of longing, wishing or wooing disposition in God, which some rashly bring in to salve their phenomena by, since it is ineffectual and consequently imperfect, it is altogether unfit to be ascribed to God, for it is nothing else but infirmity and want of power in man. And so much for the first observation.

The second observation was this, that the reason why one man believes, that is embraces the way of Salvation, and another doth not, is finally to be resolved into God's eternal Election of the one and Reprobation of the other; or more briefly thus, that only those who are ordained unto Eternal Life, either do or can believe. And the reason is briefly this, because only those who are designed to the End shall be made effectual partakers of the means which leads unto it. Thus our Saviour, rendering a reason why some did not understand his doctrine, gives this, because to them it was not given. "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." Matt.13:11. And the Apostle calls the Gospel savour of life, only to the saved, that is only to those who are actually designed to Salvation. "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved." II Cor.2:15. And the same Apostle exhorting the Thessalonians to faith and love gives this as a motive, that God had not appointed them to wrath, but to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ. I Thes.5:9. Where by the way, we may take notice, that a certain knowledge of our Eternal Election in Christ is so far from hindering any in the practice of godliness, that it is by the Apostle used as an argument to quicken their endeavor, as if he had said, because God hath appointed you unto eternal life, therefore seek diligently that you may be found of him in Christ. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Tit.2:14.

There is a settled chain and connection of causes, which do immutably infer one another; to be saved presupposes obedience, that faith, that, the gift of God, and that runs up to the highest link, which is the Grace and Favor of God to every poor believer. It is certain that all have not the Grace, because they have not the gift of faith, that being not thrown at random on all, but reserved as a peculiar blessing for God's chosen ones, and them whom he effectually calls, while he leaves others to their natural hardness and impenitence. "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." II Thes.2:13-14.

It is not in vain or figuratively spoken only, that every believer is said to be new born, again created and fashioned, &c., but these phrases imply this necessary truth, that as none but those who are created men, can put forth the acts of men, and such creation they could not procure nor attribute to themselves, because as yet they were not, so none but those who are created unto good works, can live in them, because naturally they lack a principle, whereby they should understand or relish them; and this is the benefit of that Eternal Election, whereby God works in all whom he loves all their works both in them and for them, Phil.2:13, that they might know and confess to the praise of his glorious Grace, that it is "not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Rom.9:16.

Before I make any use, I must prevent an objection, which every man naturally is ready to urge, and not to take notice of it, were to prevaricate with the Truth. The objection is this, if it be so that some, and that a limited number are appointed to life, and only such can believe, then it follows that we may live as we want, for if we are appointed to Life we shall be saved, God will in his good time accomplish his purpose concerning us, which all our endeavor can neither promote nor alter.

To this objection which most carnal minds do not only reason but live by, I may answer as the Apostle did, when having asserted the freeness of Grace, and how altogether

undeserved it was on our part, he brings in a profane Person asking this question, Rom.6:1, "shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound," what shall we put God to it, and try if we can out-sin the riches of his Mercy? To this the Apostle replies only, "let it not be," or it may not be such a thought can ever arise in anyone's heart, who does truly understand what mercy means. "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Rom.6:2. So may I say here, if any who conceives himself elect shall draw this conclusion from hence, because God hath chosen me, and I am sure of my Salvation, therefore I will run on and provoke him daily, and strive as it were, to blot out and cross his Decree, thou canst not do it, thou canst not apprehend that God loved thee with an everlasting love, and singled thee out from the lump of mankind when so many millions were to be undone eternally, but it will work upon thee, and melt all thy affections into a grateful return of service unto that God, to whom thou art obliged for so Infinite and Undeserved mercy.

But if any who hath a mind to live wickedly shall argue, if I am not designed to life I shall be damned, let me do what I can, I answer to such a one.

First, that there is no possibility for any truth to be so clear, but that evil men may abuse it to their own destruction, and I believe everyone sees how the making of God's decree conditional will lead a corrupt mind to the same inference, for he may as well say, if God foresee, that I shall believe, I shall believe; and so in the meanwhile take his liberty.

Secondly, if in accordance with his vain imagination he considers that God's Decree of Election hath no influence to necessitate the will of any, but he that believes though ordained to it, yet believe freely and willingly; so the Decree of Reprobation hath no influence at all to the damning of any, because though those who are reprobated shall certainly be damned, yet sentence shall not pass upon them according to the act of God's Reprobation, but according to the merit of their works. God's decree is made by power, but it is executed by Law; and therefore while thy damnation is yet uncertain, do not dispute thyself into such a state, as to endeavor to make it just.

Lastly, the rule of our obedience is not God's decree but God's command. Moses when he had given the Law, exhorts

them to walk according to it, and to check their inquisitiveness, tells them that they were not to ascend into Heaven, there to pry and search into God's Decree concerning themselves, but that the word was nigh them, in their hearts, that they might do it. Deut.30:14. And the reason is bottomed upon that eternal and un-answerable truth that secret things belong to God, but things revealed to us, that they may be our rule to walk by. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Law." Deut.29:29. So that in short we are so to ascribe all Power and Praise to God, as to look upon and acknowledge him the Great and Supreme Disposer of all things, but yet we are so to live in our obedience and submission to his command, as if nothing was at all decreed concerning us, but that we are entirely left to the council and power of our own will. For if we conclude against ourselves, and live like reprobates we are sure to perish. But, with a heart brought down to a state of submission to Christ, acknowledging no righteousness but his alone, and a hearty and zealous endeavor striving to do the will of God, and leaving the event unto his merciful Providence, against such, I dare boldly affirm, there is no condemnation, and the world shall sooner perish than such a soul miscarry.

Therefore the use I shall make of this discourse, so necessary for these caviling times, is to exhort us all that we would leave off disputing and fall to practice. Since it is certain that the foundation of God standeth sure, II Tim.2:19, which is, that God knoweth them who are his, that is, knows them most definitely and intimately, so that we may vex and distemper ourselves by wrangling, but we shall not be able to shake or alter that.

All the while we are disputing we are like Abraham's ram caught by the horns in the thicket, when we should be offered up in sacrifice, we are vainly struggling to entangle and snare ourselves with our own dilemmas. It will be counted madness in a traveler, who has a great way to go, and but a little time to perform his journeys in, if he should leave his road, and needlessly run into a wood, where, besides the troublesomeness of the passage, he is sure to lose his time, if not himself, and in the end sit down to lament his folly. No less unwise are we if we

leave the safe and known path of Gospel precepts, to wander about in the endless maze and labyrinth of God's decrees.

If in worship, when a man strives to serve God more strictly or in a more specious manner than the rule warrants him, his whole devotion is slighted with a, "who hath required this at your hand," Isa.1:12, how much more severely shall he be reproved, who ventures upon a forbidden as well as undoing curiosity? In short, all the while we are arguing, we are out God's way; and in the way only of our own inventions; and until we get out of it, we may justly fear that the issue will be confusion, amazement, doubting and at last despair.

If men would but once be sober in their reasonings, it would appear but a modest request, that God and his word alone should have the honor, above and beyond our private conceptions; for he will be found just, when he comes to judgment, but woe be to that man who dares arraign him?

Whatever vain men may appropriate to themselves, and upon the confidence of superficial and empty rhetoric, venture to intermeddle with, and to pass their censure upon matters so infinitely above their reach, yet they will find at last, that obedience is better than knowledge, that self-denial is the only Gospel sacrifice, and of all believers, the humblest Christian is the best.

Therefore, since there are a certain number appointed unto eternal life, let us give ourselves no rest, until we can comfortably pronounce to ourselves that we are of that number. Many are the signs by which a man may judge of his eternal condition, and one of them is expressed here in the text, acts 13:48, that "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Believed the word of the Lord concerning Salvation by Christ. So then go presently and ask yourselves this question, do I believe? Was I made willing in the day of God's power to embrace Christ and Salvation through the merits of his blood and righteousness alone? Yes perhaps you will say, I am willing, I was indeed made willing; and now gory "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Gal.6:14.

Then go on further and ask, but am I willing to receive Christ upon his own terms, to acknowledge my own wretchedness without him, to fly to him, as I would to shore out

of a tempest? Do I see myself in so undone and lost a condition, that nothing but his Satisfaction can relieve me? Then go to Christ, for he calls thee, he calls thee as effectually, as if thou hearest a voice directly from Heaven saying, "come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt.11:28. Come with all thy sins, nay with all thy fears upon thee, and the Lord shall take thy burden, settle thy distractions, and speak to thy soul in the midst of its disquietness, "be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Matt.14:27.

If after this thou canst be content with nothing but Christ, if thou art made willing to quit all for him, and to count the world only as a stage, where either thy faith or patience must be daily exercised; if thou dost find that sweetness in the face of a reconciled God, as no earthly enjoyment could bride thee to a willing commission of any known sin against him, then go and enter into thy rest, and take an earnest of thy heavenly inheritance in Christ. For if the case be thus with thee, and thou as "preserved in Jesus Christ, and called," Jude 1:1, art even now partaking of Christ's heavenly riches, Eph.1:3, then Heaven and Happiness are as surely thine as if thou were already there, and even while thou livest, thou art placed in so high a sphere of felicity and contentment, as all the labored and perishing comforts of this world cannot amount to fill up one minute of thy entire satisfaction.

This deserves to be more particularly insisted upon, and some motives likewise might be urged to press all unto this duty of examining their future state. But certainly they who know what Eternity is, and how near they are to it, how every minute, for ought they know, may wast them thither, they will not long put off or defer the inquiry, for all the while they do so, they evidence to themselves that they have no lot nor portion in the heavenly inheritance. For though both Grace and Glory are bestowed freely, yet we may sadly conclude, that they are not designed for those who look not after them.

FINIS