

The Reign of Grace

Chapter 3

By [Abraham Booth](#)

OF GRACE, AS IT REIGNS IN OUR ELECTION AMONG the various blessings which flow from sovereign goodness, and are dispensed by reigning grace, that of election deservedly claims our first regard. It was in the decree of election that the grace of our infinite Sovereign did first appear, in choosing Christ as the head, and in him, as his members, all that should ever be saved. Election, therefore, is the first link in the golden chain of our salvation: and the cornerstone in the amazing fabric of human happiness. As JEHOVAH is the former of universal nature, the supporter and governor of all worlds; and as it is no, consistent with the perfection of an infinite Agent, to act without the highest and noblest design; so the adored Creator, before he imparted existence, or time commenced, proposed and appointed an end worthy of himself, in all he determined to do. This was his own glory. This was his grand design in all the various ranks of existence to which his almighty fiat gave birth. Not a single creature in the vast scale of dependent being, but is connected with this as its ultimate end. The loftiest seraph that surrounds the throne, and the meanest insect that crawls in the dust, have the same original Parent, and are designed, in different ways, to answer the same exalted end. To deny this, or to suppose that the most perfect Agent did not act for the most worthy purpose, is highly derogatory to the dignity of the First Cause. Nobly conspicuous, among the various orders of animate and inanimate existence in this lower creation, was man, when first formed and recent from the hands of his Maker. Man, therefore, as bearing the lively impress of his great Creator's image; possessing such elevated faculties and large capacities for operation and enjoyment; was designed, in a peculiar manner, to answer this highest of all purposes. Nor was the entrance of sin subversive of the grand design, but made subservient to it in various ways. It was impossible such an event should bring confusion into that stupendous plan of divine operation which consummate wisdom had formed. For, known to the omniscient God, are all his works, and all events, from the beginning of the world. All that is comprehended in what men call contingent, is absolute certainty with Him who is perfect in knowledge. The entrance of sin, therefore, among moral agents, whether angels or men, could not possibly frustrate JEHOVAH'S purpose, or render his original designs abortive. The counsel of the Lord shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. – Though the entrance of moral evil among mankind was an awful event; though Adam, and every individual of his numerous offspring were contaminated, injured, and ruined by it; yet it appears from divine revelation, that He who declares the end from the

beginning, not only foresaw it, but from eternity determined to display his perfections and promote his glory by it. His determination was, to glorify himself in the complete salvation and endless felicity of some of the apostate race, and in the righteous condemnation of others: so that a revenue of glory shall arise to the great Supreme from all mankind. This glory shall arise, as well from that haughty Egyptian monarch, who renounced God's dominion and said: Who is JEHOVAH that I should obey him? as from the king of Israel, whose exalted character is, A man after God's own heart. As well from a traitorous Judas, who sold his Master's blood; as from a faithful Paul, who counted not his very life dear, so that he might finish his course with joy, and promote the Saviour's honour. These shall be the monuments of sovereign grace; those, of righteous vengeance, and both for the glory of God to all eternity. Nor is any thing more agreeable to right reason, or the sacred Scripture, than to conclude, That as JEHOVAH is the first Cause, so he should be the last End; and that he should be at the most perfect liberty to dispose of his offending creatures in what way he pleases, for his own glory. To dispute this, is to deny his divine supremacy, and, with Pharaoh, to renounce his eternal dominion. Such being the final cause of the creation in general, and of mankind in particular, that Sovereign Being who has an absolute right to do what he will with his own having determined to create man and to leave him to the freedom of his own will, foreseeing he would certainly fall; of his free distinguishing love, chose a certain number out of the apostate race of Adam, and ordained them to a participation of grace here, anal to the enjoyment of glory thereafter. In the execution of which purpose, by means every way becoming himself, he determined to glorify all his infinite excellencies. Such is that immanent act of God which is commonly called election, and is the subject of this chapter. The doctrine of election, or, which is the same thing, the doctrine of distinguishing grace, is now very much exploded. It is generally deemed unworthy of serious notice, by the learned and philosophic gentlemen of the present age. Though it cannot be denied to have made a considerable figure in those systems of divinity, that were adopted by men of eminence for piety and learning in former ages; and particularly by our first reformers from Popery; yet now it is ranked, by many, among the rash opinions of a credulous antiquity. It is cashiered, as a doctrine abhorrent from reason, and as at eternal war with the moral perfections of God. It is consigned over to oblivion, as worthy of no more regard than the bold inquiries and wild conclusions; the laborious trifling and learned lumber, of the ancient, doting, Popish schoolmen. It is also traduced as a declared enemy to practical piety, and as highly injurious to the comfort and hope of mankind. This being the case, we need not wonder that it is now become quite unfashionable. But what is the reason of this tragical outcry against it? If I be not greatly deceived, it is as follows. This doctrine lays the axe at the root of all our boasted moral excellence. This doctrine, in its native consequences, demolishes every subterfuge of human pride; as it leaves not the shadow of a difference between one man and another, why the Deity should regard and save this person rather than that; but teaches all who know and all who embrace it, to rest in that memorable maxim; **EVEN SO, FATHER, FOR SO IT SEEMED GOOD IN THY SIGHT;** resolving the whole into divine grace and divine sovereignty.

Without paying the least compliment to the learning, sagacity, or character of any who dare to arraign the divine conduct, it repels their insolence in the following blunt manner; Nay, but, O man! who art thou that repliest against God? – It further teaches, that as unmerited kindness and sovereign favour began the work of salvation: so the same grace must carry it on and complete the vast design: while the Most High, ever jealous of his honour, is determined to have all the glory. Other reasons might be mentioned; but these may suffice to show, that the spirit of independence which is natural to man, and reigns in the unregenerate, must be fired with resentment by such an attack upon it. Hence the few votaries of this unpopular doctrine must expect reproach and ridicule, if not something more severe, to attend the profession of a tenet so unpolite. It is not, however, my present design, to enter upon a laboured defence of this offensive doctrine. I shall leave that to the friends of truth, who have more leisure and greater abilities. This, indeed, has been already often performed with great advantage to the church of God. I shall, therefore, content myself with taking a short view of the principal branches of this article of the Christian faith; with proposing a few arguments, which appear to me plain and pertinent in vindication of it; and with pointing out its proper improvement. That those who in the volume of inspiration are called the elect, are a people distinguished from others, and that all mankind are not included under this denomination; are so apparent as hardly to need any proof. These things are so obvious, from the allowed signification of the term, and the tenor of divine revelation, as to leave no room for dispute. From the signification of the term— Because where all, whether persons or things, are equally accepted, there is no preference given; there is no choice made; there are none left. For to elect and to choose, are the same thing. Where any are chosen, others must be refused. From the tenor of divine revelation— As it is written; I speak not of you all; I know whom I have chosen—I have chosen you out of the world—The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded. That those who are so denominated are not collective bodies, appears with superior evidence from what is asserted concerning them, in the same infallible rule of our faith and practice. They are described as having their names written in heaven, and in the book of life. They are said to be ordained to eternal life, and chosen to salvation. And, in the boldest manner imaginable, it is asked by one, who was thoroughly acquainted with their state and privileges; Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Now a small degree of discernment will enable us to conclude, that these things cannot with truth be affirmed concerning nations, churches, or communities of any sort, considered as such. But, on the contrary, they strongly imply, that the elect, as distinguished from others, are particular persons, whose names are in a peculiar manner known to God; that election relates to spiritual blessings and eternal enjoyments; and that the objects of it are dear to God, and forever precious in his sight. That the objects of election are particular persons. may further appear from hence. From the beginning Jehovah designed to manifest his love in the salvation of sinners. The damnation inflicted on many puts it beyond a doubt, that this design extended only to some; for all are not saved, and the divine purpose cannot be rendered void. That salvation was to be wrought by his own Son, as invested with the character, and as

performing the work of a Mediator and Surety. As a Mediator and Substitute, he was to obey, and bleed, and die; die, under a charge of the blackest guilt, and feeling the weight of the heaviest curse. (2 Cor. v. 21. Gal. iii. 13) It was necessary, therefore, to be determined, how many, and who in particular, should be interested in this wonderful work, and saved by it. Their persons, as well as their situation and wants, must be known to him and distinguished from others. For it is absurd to suppose, that he should engage as a substitute, to perform obedience and pour his blood; to lay down his life as a ransom to satisfy justice, and all this for persons unknown. When any one engages, in a legal way, to become responsible for another in matters of debt or offence; he is always supposed to have some knowledge of the person for whom he engages, so as to distinguish him from all others, who may be in similar circumstances and stand in the same need; and the name of the person, whose cause he undertakes, must also be mentioned in the engagement to render it valid. Nor does it appear that the design of God in the salvation of sinners, by the incarnation and death of his own Son, could have been certainly answered on any other hypothesis. Supposing, for instance, that it had been the divine purpose to save, by the mediation of Jesus, all who should ever believe; without ascertaining the persons who should thus embrace the Redeemer, it would have remained dubious whether any would be finally saved; because uncertain whether any would ever believe. But if it were certain that some would believe, this certainty must arise from the purpose of God; for, on any other foundation, nothing future can be absolutely certain. If it was determined that some should believe, the divine appointment must be considered as extending to every individual whose faith and salvation are supposed to be certain. For faith is a gift of grace, and could not be foreseen in any but these on whom the great Dispenser of every favour had determined to bestow it. Hence we may safely infer, that as the death of Christ was absolutely certain, in virtue of a divine purpose, and the everlasting compact between the Eternal Three; so all the individuals that should ever be saved by the undertaking of Jesus, were chosen of God; were distinguished from others, and consigned to the great Shepherd as his peculiar charge. It is equally clear that the elect were chosen of God before time began; for their election is one of the first effects of divine love. This love was from everlasting The love of God to their persons, and their election to complete felicity, must, therefore, be eternal. If, indeed, there had ever been a point in duration, in which the blessed God had no thoughts of a Mediator, nor any designs of manifesting his love to miserable and guilty creatures; then it might be supposed that there was an instant in which the favoured few, who are called his elect, were not the objects of his choice; but if it was Jehovah's eternal purpose to manifest the riches of his grace by a Mediator; if the Deity, subsisting in three distinct Persons, and acting under the personal characters of the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY SPIRIT, did, before all worlds, resolve on the measures to be pursued; and if a Mediator was appointed, as the grand medium of divine operation in the wonderful work; then we may safely conclude, that the persons to be interested in this mediation and benefited by it, were fixed upon and chosen. For both reason and revelation concur to forbid our supposing, that the Son of the blessed should engage as

Mediator, and act as a Substitute, for he did not know whom; or that the counsels of Heaven should terminate in mere peradventures. It would be equally incongruous for us to imagine, that a resolution in the Eternal Mind concerning the work of redemption, which is evidently rite chief of all the ways of God, should have any other date than eternity. Expressly in our favour and in proof of the point are the declarations of the Holy Ghost. Thus we read; God hath, from the beginning, chosen you to salvation. – He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. They were chosen in Christ as their head and representative. Christ and the elect constitute one mystical body. He the head, and they the members; the fulness of him that filleth all in all. Before the foundation of the world. This emphatical phrase is evidently expressive of eternity. Before the world was formed, or any creature existed, time did not commence. The commencement of time, and that of created existence, are exactly of the same date. Prior, therefore, to the formation of the universe, duration was absolute eternity. The same infallible writer in the same epistle, speaking of the amazing scheme of man's redemption formed in the mind of God, calls it the ETERNAL PURPOSE, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord; which, as we have before proved, necessarily infers the choice of the objects of that redemption. This truth may be farther evinced by considering, that as the inheritance of glory was prepared for its future possessors, before the foundation of the world; so grace, and all spiritual blessings that were necessary to fit them for the enjoyment of it, were given them in Christ Jesus; were lodged in his hands, as their federal head, as the appointed Mediator, and for their use, before the world began. (2 Tim. i. 9.–Eph. i. 3, 4.) Nor can we conceive of any new determinations arising in the Eternal Mind, or any purposes formed by our Maker, that were not from everlasting, without supposing him defective in knowledge, or mutable in his perfections. Suppositions these, which very ill become the character of Him whose name is JEHOVAH. But is there any reason assignable, why the elect were chosen to life and glory, while others were left in their sins to perish under the stroke of divine justice? None, in the creature. For all mankind, considered in themselves, were viewed as in the same situation, and on a perfect level. Notwithstanding, the great Author of all things and Lord of the world condescends to assign the reason when he says; I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. In this the adored Redeemer perfectly acquiesced, as appears from those remarkable words; Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. In this the penetrating judgment of that wonderful man, who was caught up to the third heaven, rested completely satisfied: (Rom. xi. 15, 16.) and in the same reason of the divine procedure we ought all to rest, without a murmuring word, or an opposing thought. Nor can we rebel against the sovereign determinations of the Most High, without incurring flagrant guilt; or persist in so doing, and escape with impunity. But supposing there was no original difference between the objects of distinguishing grace, and those who finally perish; yet, did not the Omniscient foresee them as possessed of faith, fruitful in holy obedience, and persevering to the end? and were not these considered by a righteous God as the cause why he chose them rather than others who were viewed as destitute of such recommendations? By no means. For grace reigns in the choice

of all the elect; and grace, as a sovereign, rejects with disdain every such proud pretence to a claim upon her. She never affords her smiles to any because they are worthy. She ennobles none because they are better than others. So to do would be quite inconsistent with her amiable character; would be utterly subversive of her grand design. Wherever she bestows her kind regards, it is with the condescension of an absolute sovereign. Wherever she interposes her helping hand, it is on the behalf of those who have no other assistance, nor any other plea. But, as a further proof of my negative, I would offer the following arguments. Faith in Christ and holy obedience are represented by the unerring Spirit as the fruits and effects of election: they cannot, therefore, be considered as the cause without absurdity in reason, and a contradiction to divine revelation. For it is written; As many as were ordained to eternal life, believe—He hath chosen us—that we might be holy. They believed because they were ordained to eternal life; not ordained to eternal life, because it was foreseen they would believe. They were chosen, not because they were, or ever would be holy; but that they might be so. (Acts xiii.48. Eph. i. 4.) Those, and those only, partake of faith, who are called by divine grace: but such only are called to faith and holiness, who were predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ. For whom he did predestinate them he also called. (Rom. viii. 30.) Again: The chosen of God are the sheep of Christ. None but those who are so denominated believe on him, according to his own declaration; Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep. (John x. 26.) By which we are taught, that believing in him does not make us sheep, or give us a right to the character; but is an evidence that we were so considered in the sight of God, and given into the hands of the great Shepherd to be saved by him. Once more: God hath called us with an holy calling, not according to, not in consideration of our works, whether past or future; but according to his own purpose and grace, which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began. (2 Tim. i. 9) If, then, we are not called according to our works or worthiness, but according to the everlasting purpose, and free distinguishing grace of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will; much less is it to be supposed, that we were chosen according to them, or in any foresight of them. To illustrate the truth and confirm the argument, it may be further observed, that faith and holiness, in the method of grace, occupy a middle station. They are neither the foundation, nor the topstone, in the spiritual building. Though inseparably connected with election, they are neither its cause nor its consummation. That is sovereign grace; this infinite glory. Faith and holiness are, as one observes, what stalks and branches are to a root; by which the vegetable juices ascend, to produce and ripen the principal fruit. By grace ye are saved THROUGH faith—chosen to salvation THROUGH sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.. Consequently, they are no more the cause of election, than the means necessary to attain any valuable end are the cause of appointing that end; than which nothing can be supposed more absurd. Besides, if men were foreseen as possessed of faith and holiness, prior to their election, and independent on it: it is hard to conceive what occasion there was for their being elected. There could be no necessity for it to secure their final happiness. For the Judge of all the earth must do right: and eternal misery was never designed to be

the portion of any who believe and are holy; for peace and salvation are inseparably joined to such a state, and to such characters. To have ordained those to happiness and glory that were foreseen to be thus qualified, would, therefore, have been altogether unnecessary. Further: Election depends on the mere good pleasure of God, without any motive in us to influence the Divine will. No other cause is assigned by Paul, when stating and defending the doctrine; no other reason is given by his Divine Master. The former asserts, that the King immortal predestinated us—according to the good pleasure of his will. That it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will. And the latter with joy declares; 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. That revelation which is here designed, is no other than the execution of the Divine purpose in election. And the only reason assigned by Him who is the Wisdom of God, and perfectly acquainted with the counsels of heaven, why the mysteries of the gospel are revealed to some; while others, of superior abilities and greater reputation among their fellow-creatures, are left in absolute ignorance, and suffered to oppose them to their aggravated ruin; is the sovereign pleasure of Him who giveth no account of any of his matters. Much to our purpose are the words of Paul, when professedly defending the doctrine of divine election. The children being not yet born, and, consequently, neither having done any good or evil, to obtain the approbation or to provoke the resentment of their Creator; that the purpose of God according to election might stand; not of works, or worthiness in the objects of it, but of the grace of him that calleth: it was said concerning a Jacob and Esau, as an instance of the divine procedure towards mankind in general, as an evidence of the truth of the doctrine; the elder shall serve the younger. And again: There is a remnant according to the election of grace. This assertion the sacred disputant proceeds to confirm by the following nervous argument—an argument taken from the nature of grace, as contradistinguished to all works and worthiness of every kind. And if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work. In this passage the truth under consideration is asserted in the plainest manner, and confirmed by the strongest reasoning. So that if any submission of judgment and conscience be due to the positive dictates of the infallible Spirit; if any regard ought to be paid to a demonstrative argument urged by the Lord's ambassador; here they are due, and here they ought to be paid. For Paul teaches and proves, that our election to eternal glory must be either entirely of grace, or entirely of works; grace and works being directly opposite. They cannot, therefore, unite in producing the same effect, or in promoting the same end. Whoever, then, acknowledges any such thing as an election of sinners to future happiness, must necessarily maintain, either, that the sole reason why they were chosen rather than others, was their own superior worthiness, without grace being concerned at all in the choice; and so their election is an act of remunerative justice; or, that they were equally unworthy of the divine regards any of those that perish; and so their election is an act of

sovereign grace. One of these he must hold, in opposition to the other. For if there be any other alternative, the apostle's argument is inconclusive. There is no reconciling expedient that can be devised by the wit of man. We may attempt a coalition between works and grace, but it will be found impracticable; while, in so doing, our pride and folly will be great, and our disappointment certain. For such an attempt would not only bring the greatest confusion into all our ideas about works and grace; but, as far as possible, destroy the very things themselves. Such persons as maintain the contrary hypothesis, may, to save appearances, say, that election is of grace; but if it be on a foresight of faith and obedience, there is in reality nothing of grace in it: for grace is free favour. On this supposition, election is no other than an appointment of a reward to its objects, on a foresight of the requisite conditions being prescribed, and performed by them. But, as such, it is an act of remunerative justice; or, at least, of fidelity and truth; and cannot, without open violence to the common signification of the terms, be denominated an act of mere favour, or of pure benevolence. That it is the design of Paul, when describing the subject in his epistle to the Romans, to exclude all consideration of human worthiness, and to resolve the election of those who are saved entirely into the grace of God, as infinitely free and divinely sovereign, appears from those objections to which he replies. For the objections made, and the answers returned, are of such a nature as would appear quite impertinent, and without the least shadow of reason to support them, on supposition that God, when he chose his people, had any regard to their superior worthiness, in comparison those who perish. The objections suppose that the divine conduct in this affair is inequitable. But such a supposition could not have been made, such a charge could never have been laid against it, by any man of sense, or of the least reflection, if the Almighty, in the decree of election, had proceeded to distinguish between one man and another, according to their personal qualities and moral worth. The infallible writer having treated about God's distinguishing love to Jacob and his rejection of Esau, starts an objection against the tenor of his arguing and the truth he maintained; an objection, he knew, that was both plausible and common. What shall we say, then? what will be inferred as the necessary consequence of our foregoing assertion? Will any one dare to conclude that there is unrighteousness with God, because he dispenses, or withholds his favours, according to his own sovereign pleasure? Far be it! such a consequence will be held in the utmost abhorrence, by all who revere their Maker. The apostle having rejected the shocking inference, in the strongest manner, proceeds to confirm his assertions and to prove his doctrine. This he does by appealing to the ancient scriptures. For He, whose name is JEHOVAH, saith to Moses; I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. From which memorable and ancient oracle, he infers the following conclusion: So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of 'God that showeth mercy. Hence it appears with striking evidence, that it was Paul's design to prove, not only that some of the fallen race were chosen, in contradistinction to others; but also, that those objects of the Divine choice were appointed to glory, not in consideration of any thing which caused them to differ from others; but purely, solely, entirely,

because it was the good pleasure of God to make them partakers of that mercy on which they had not the least claim, any more than those who perish. For, on a supposition of the contrary, it does not appear that his quotation from the writings of Moses, and the conclusion he forms upon it, were at all to his purpose; but rather adapted to mislead his reader, and to bias his judgment in favour of error. The zealous and indefatigable teacher of heavenly truth, in prosecuting his subject, meets with another objection which he is equally careful to obviate. For, after having asserted that Jehovah has mercy on whom he will, and whom he will, he hardeneth, it is added; Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault with any of his creatures, or blame their conduct? for who hath resisted his will, or rendered his purposes void? –This objection exhibits a faithful mirror, in which every opposer of divine sovereignty may see his face and read his character. The most horrid and shocking consequences that are now charged on the doctrine of eternal, unconditional, and personal election, are here included and reduced to a small compass. This objection, in modern style, reads thus: "According to the Calvinistic doctrine of election, men are mere machines. They are impelled to this or that by a fatal necessity. They are no longer the proper objects of praise or blame, of reward or punishment. Adieu, therefore, to every virtuous action and all praiseworthy deeds. Whether we be righteous or wicked, here; whether we be saved or damned, hereafter; an arbitrary will, and a sovereign, omnipotent decree are the cause of all." –Such persons, however, as are inclined to repeat the stale objection, may do well to consider, in what manner the apostle refutes it; and how he treats the proud opposer of the sovereign prerogative of the great Supreme. The objection is levelled against the sovereignty of God, in making such an immense distinction between persons equally unworthy of Divine clemency. But, though bold and blasphemous to the last degree, the unerring teacher does not refute, or attempt to remove it, by informing the objector, that it was not his design, by the immediately foregoing assertion, to affirm, that the sole cause of that infinite difference which shall subsist to eternity between the state of one man and of another, equally guilty and alike miserable, considered in themselves, was the sovereign pleasure of God. No; he is far from giving any such hint; but immediately recurs to the supreme dominion of Him who formed the universe, as a clear consideration of sufficient importance, and sufficiently clear, to establish the point. So far from softening his former assertions, however harsh they might seem, that he at once confirms the truth he asserted, and illustrates the propriety of his language. In doing of which he suggests, that the objection, horrid as it is, cannot have the least force, or pertinency of application, except it were proved that the Majesty of heaven had not an absolute right to dispense his favours just as he pleases. But this the resolute asserter of Jehovah's honour was not willing to grant. This he could by no means allow, without denying the God that is above. He, therefore, boldly repels the confidence of the proud objector, by a strong exclamation, and a mortifying query. Nay, but, O man I who art THOU that repliest against God? Shall a worm of the earth, an insect, an atom, arraign his conduct who is Lord of the universe, and pronounce it unrighteous? Shall impotence and dust fly in the face of Omnipotence? Shall corruption and guilt prescribe roles of equity, by

which the Most Holy shall regulate his behaviour toward the rebellious subjects of his boundless empire? Far be it! Wo to him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth; but let not the despicable fragment presume to make war upon Heaven; lest Divine wrath, like a devouring fire, break out and consume it. The zealous and cautious disputant having severely rebuked the opposer's folly and arrogance, proceeds to confirm his assertion, and to illustrate the momentous truth by a familiar instance, and by appealing to the common sense of mankind. Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? For example: Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour? None can deny it. Is this power allowed, by the common consent of mankind, to belong to the meanest artificer; and shall it be denied to HIM, who is the Former of all things? Such a denial would be a monstrous compound of absurdity and blasphemy. – The apostle now proceeds to apply his illustration. What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, having endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, by their own rebellion against him, should, in the end, pour out his vengeance upon them; who shall dare to pronounce his conduct unrighteous? And, what if the same sovereign Being, that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which, he had afore prepared unto glory, determined to manifest infinite love in their complete deliverance from deserved destruction, who has a right to complain? Shall the eye of any be evil, because their offended Maker is good? Has he not an eternal right to do what he will with his own? Or, is he a debtor to any of his creatures? If so, they shall be fully recompensed. Shall every petty sovereign, in the kingdoms of this world, be allowed to choose his own favourites; and, in certain cases, to manifest his clemency to some delinquents, while he leaves others to suffer the desert of their crimes, without being subject to the control of his meanest subjects in the performance of those sovereign acts? and shall HE who rules over all be denied the exercise of his supreme royal prerogative? Absurd, in supposition! impossible, in fact! – But though God bestows his favour on whom he pleases, yet, as he is an infinitely wise agent, he must always have the highest reason for what he does. Divine sovereignty, therefore, must not be considered as a blind partiality, or a dictate of mere will without wisdom; but as the exercise of an all-comprehensive understanding, and of a will that is inflexibly right, ordering all the affairs of Jehovah's vast empire for the manifestation of his own glorious attributes. To conceive of a sovereign decree, as detached from wisdom and rectitude, is to picture to ourselves the conduct of a Turkish despot; not the appointment of Him that governs the world. The love of God to his offending creatures must be considered, in the whole of its exercise, as under the direction of his Divine understanding: and as his boundless intelligence comprehends all possibilities, his love must be consummately wise in all its operations. The supreme perfection of Jehovah's nature forbids our supposing, that he can decree without wisdom, any more than govern without rectitude, or punish without justice. Hence the apostle, when discoursing on that profound subject, eternal predestination, concludes thus; O, the depths! – of what? An arbitrary will,

or an absolute sovereignty, detached from wisdom? far from it. But of the riches both of the WISDOM and KNOWLEDGE of God! To resolve those eternal decrees, which constitute the great plan of Providence, into the Divine will, detached from Divine wisdom; is neither the doctrine of Scripture, nor agreeable to sound reason—is to represent the Supreme Lord under the notion of an eastern tyrant, rather than to give an idea of GOD, ONLY WISE. If, then, we consider the Almighty as choosing any of the fallen race to life and happiness, we behold him exercising the mercy of a compassionate Father, to his miserable offspring. But if we consider him as choosing this person rather than that, when both were equally wretched; we view him as vested with the character of a sovereign Lord, and as the sole proprietor of his own favours. If, therefore, the question be asked; Why any were chosen to salvation, when all deserved to perish? The answer is; Because our Maker is merciful. But if it be further asked; Why Paul, for instance, was chosen rather than Judas? The answer is; Because he is Lord of all, and has an indisputable right to do what he will with his own. But if this answer will not satisfy the curious inquirer, he is directed by the Spirit of inspiration to ask the potter, what was the reason of his very different procedure with the same lump of clay; and why he formed the vessels into which it was wrought, for such different and opposite uses? The answer will readily answer, as directed by common sense; "Not any thing in the clay itself; but my own deliberate and free choice. For it was of the same kind, and possessed the same qualities throughout the whole mass: nor could one part dictate how it would be formed, or for what uses, any more than another." Thus the most ignorant potter, without hesitation, would assert a kind of sovereignty over his clay. And are not mankind in the hand of God, as clay in the hand of the potter? Or, shall Jehovah's sovereignty over his offending creatures, be inferior to that of a puny mortal over passive matter? Reason and revelation forbid the thought. In election, therefore, we have a striking display of Divine grace in its utmost free-ness; and of God's dominion in its highest sovereignty. Of the former, toward the vessels of mercy; of the latter, toward all mankind. That, we behold with admiration and joy; this, we revere in silence: well remembering who it is that says; BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD. Having shown, in the preceding paragraphs, that election is an act of sovereign grace; I now proceed to consider the great end which the Supreme Lord intended by it. The ultimate end is his own eternal glory; and, subordinate to it, the complete happiness of all his people. The glory of the Supreme Being is, as before observed, the final cause of all the eternal counsels, and of all Divine operations; especially of those, which respect the salvation of sinners. They were all designed for the PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE. Too ready we are to imagine, that the purpose and pleasure of God terminate in the happiness of those that are chosen, and in the misery of those rejected; as though the eternal felicity, and the everlasting torment of sinful creatures, were the final cause of the Divine decree. But this is a great mistake, and represents the doctrine of predestination in a very false, as well as unfavourable light. For as it would be pregnant with blasphemy to suppose, that He who is supremely blessed and supremely good, should take delight in the infinite misery of a rational being, without reference to a further and nobler end; (It is indeed said, I will laugh at

your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. But then, as the learned VITRINGA observes;

Quod de Deo anthropopathos dictum intelligi debet; non vere, ac si exitium hominis miseri et stultitia sua voluntaria pereuntis, Deo delectationem adferat; sed quod mala, quae gravissimi peccatores juste perserunt, maxime convenient rationibus Divinae justice, in cujus exercitio Deus acquiescit, et sibi placet. (Comment. ad Canticum Musis, p. 133.)

so we cannot conceive, on any principles of reason, or of Scripture, that he should propose any thing short of his own glory in the wonderful economy of human salvation. For as it would be highly injurious to the Divine character to suppose that the misery of apostate creatures is the ultimate end at which the eternal Sovereign aims, in the damnation of those who perish; or that any thing short of his own glory, in the displays of his spotless purity and inflexible justice, was the end which he had in view; so it would be greatly unworthy of his infinite wisdom and boundless perfection for us to imagine, that the glory of his own grace, and the everlasting honour of all his adorable excellencies, were not his supreme design in the free election and complete felicity of all his people. Does he execute vengeance on any of the works of his hands? it is to demonstrate the infinite opposition of all his perfections to moral evil, and for the honour of his eternal justice, as a righteous Governor. Does he spare any of the rebellious subjects of his vast dominions, and save them from the death they deserved? it is to display his mercy in connexion with truth and righteousness, and for the glory of all his unchangeable attributes. We may therefore conclude with Paul, that the great end of election, and of all its consequent blessings, is no other than to make known the RICHES OF GOD'S GLORY on the vessels of mercy. As the eternal glory of God, in the consummate happiness of all his chosen, is the exalted end of the decree of election; so the means appointed to accomplish the wonderful design, are equally worthy of infinite wisdom. They are such as proclaim the just God and the Saviour; such as demand the testimony of conscience, that the Lord is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works. The principal of these means undoubtedly are, the incarnation of the eternal Son, and his Divine mediation; the sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. For thus we read: God hath appointed us to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ –He hath chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Redemption by the blood of Jesus, and sanctification by the Spirit of God, are equally necessary to accomplish the great design. For as there is no remission without shedding of blood; so, without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. As none shall be condemned to final perdition, but those who did such things as were worthy of death, so none shall enjoy the inheritance of glory, but those whom impartial justice shall entirely acquit, and immaculate holiness completely approve. And as none of the damned shall ever be able to assign any other cause of their infinite punishment, but that sin which they freely committed so all the elect shall ascribe their salvation to the grace of God and the work of Immanuel. We may therefore conclude, that though Christ and his mediation

were not the cause of election, yet his obedience and death were the grand means appointed for the execution of that gracious purpose. And though the Almighty chose no man to glory, because of his future faith and obedience, yet provision was made, in the sovereign decree, for the sanctification of all its objects, prior to their enjoyment of blessedness. The purpose of God in election is immutable, and infallibly connected with the eternal felicity of all its objects. That this decree is unchangeable, appears from the immutability of the divine purposes in general. For there is the same reason that the appointment of God, in the choice of his people, should unchangeably stand, as there is for any other of his eternal designs; and that immutability is stamped upon the divine decrees in general, the Scriptures abundantly show. Thus it is written: The Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? –My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure –He is in one mind, and who can turf, Him? And what his soul desireth, even that He doth –To show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel –Who hath resisted his will? –That the purpose of God according to election might stand –. With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (Isa. xiv. 27, and xlvj, 10. Job xxiii. 13. Heb, vi. 17. Rom. ix 11,19. James i. 17.) Nor can we suppose that God should reverse his decrees, or alter his purposes, without impeaching, either his omniscience, as though he did not foresee the events that would happen; or his power, as if he were not able to execute his own designs: neither of which can possibly attend that infinite Being, whose will is fate, and whose word is the basis of the universe. If God were to change his mind, it must be either for the better, or for the worse. If for the better, he was not perfectly wise in his former purpose. If for the worse, he is not wise in his present resolve. For there can be no alteration without a tacit reflection, either on the past, or on the present determination. If a man change his resolution, he is apprehensive of some defect in his former purpose, which moves him to such a change: and this must arise, either from a want of capacity to foresee, or from not duly considering the object of his counsel. But neither of these can be supposed of Him who is supremely wise without denying his Deity. A change of purpose may, indeed, be an act of wisdom in the rational creature; but it supposes folly in his former conduct, which is inconsistent with consummate perfection. The only wise God had no occasion for second thoughts. As he is wise to perfection, he sees no cause of reversing his purposes. As he is boundless in power, he is subject to no control in executing his will, or in making his people partakers of those blessings he designed for them. To suppose, therefore, that any who were chosen to eternal glory should finally fail of enjoying it, is an imagination absurdly impious; as it suggests a charge of palpable imperfection against JEHOVAH, and would make him altogether such an one as ourselves. That election is infallibly connected with eternal happiness, appears from the following remarkable passage: Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? –If God be for us, who can be against us? If the purpose of God in election be not immutable; or if the objects of it might possibly fail of the glorious end; there would be no certain connexion between the several blessings that are here mentioned. On such a supposition, to argue, as the

apostle does, from the past election of any persons, to their future glorification, would be exceedingly weak, and the inference a gross inconsequence. Nor would there have been any propriety in his joyful exclamation; What shall we then say to these things? nor any solid foundation for this bold conclusion; If God be for us, who can be against us? For, admitting that God may possibly change his purpose; or, that his decree may prove weak and ineffectual, so that in any instance the event designed by it may not be produced; there was but little reason for Paul thus to exclaim in admiration and joy, or with confidence thus to conclude upon his everlasting happiness, from the consideration of God's electing love. To impute such unmeaning and inconclusive argumentation to him, would be an high reflection upon him, as Gamaliel's pupil; would be absolutely inconsistent with his more exalted character, as an amanuensis to the Spirit of wisdom. We may, therefore, safely conclude that election to future happiness, and the certain enjoyment of it, cannot be separated. For, Whom he did predestinate –them he also glorified. Having considered this important truth under the several foregoing views, I shall now proceed to show that it is a doctrine according to godliness; and that it is nobly adapted to promote the holiness and comfort of true Christians. As an article of that faith which was once delivered to the saints; as an infallible truth of the gospel, its tendency must be salutary, its influence must be sanctifying, on all who cordially embrace it. Such will ever find, that it wears the most friendly aspect on their progress in real holiness, and on their enjoyment of substantial peace. Could it be proved that it has no influence on these, we might rent, venture, without hesitation, to renounce it as an error, and to abhor it as an enemy. For that is no part of evangelical truth, which, in its genuine tendency, is not adapted to promote the happiness of real Christians, and to advance the interests of true holiness. This, however, is not the case with the doctrine under consideration. For a frequent and devout meditation upon it, by those who are taught from above, and who view it in its proper connexions, is evidently calculated to humble their souls in the dust before the eternal Sovereign; to inflame their hearts with love to his adorable name; and to excite their gratitude for benefits received and blessings expected. Consequently, their holiness and comfort must be advanced by it: for humility, love, and gratitude, are the vitals of real religion. As these abound in the heart, our spiritual joys are increased, and our Maker is glorified. As these abate, we lose the savour of divine things, and the interests of religion decline. Where these have no existence, the most extensive round of duties, the most costly and shining performances, are of no esteem in the sight of God. This doctrine is adapted to promote genuine humility. For it shows that all mankind, in their natural state, are equally obnoxious to wrath and exposed to ruin; and, exclusive of that grace which appears and reigns in election, that their condition is absolutely desperate. It allows not the least liberty for any of the sons of men to claim superior worth, or to glory over their fellows. When selfadmiring thoughts arise in the Christian's breast, it stops them short with needful and sharp rebuke; Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it? Those therefore, who are the favoured objects of distinguishing love, and who look for

salvation by it; discovering that their persons are alike sinful and their state equally wretched, considered in themselves as the persons or state of those that finally perish; cannot, according to the genius of this doctrine, but lie low in humility before God. Being fully convinced that the eternal choice of their persons was not on account of the least possible difference between themselves and others; and that the whole reason of their hope centres in that grace which might have been manifested to others, had the great Sovereign so determined; they are at all times free to acknowledge, that the chief of sinners, and the most worthless objects, are their proper characters. The influence of this humbling truth they feel in their consciences, and their ardent desire is to express it in their lives. Let us attend the believer in his secret retirements: let us behold him on his bended knee, and hear him pouring out his soul to God. In his intercourse with Heaven, at the throne of grace, his language will be to the following import. "Thou GREAT SUPREME, who art glorious in holiness, and the infinite Sovereign of all worlds; who humblest thyself to behold the things that are in the highest heavens; whose condescension is unspeakably great, in deigning to regard the persons or services of the most holy and exalted creatures; didst thou consider me in my low estate, as a fallen creature and a miserable sinner? Did thy everlasting love fix on me as its object, when I might, with the greatest equity, have been marked out as a victim for eternal justice? Is not my person polluted, and my state by nature damnable? Was not my original depravity as great, and are not my actual transgressions as numerous as any which can be found among the apostate sons of Adam? And hast thou determined to make me an everlasting monument of sparing mercy, while millions are left to suffer the awful desert of their crimes? Nothing in me couldst thou behold, but a shocking compound of impurity and folly, of guilt and wretchedness. Nothing in my conduct couldst thou foresee, but what was adapted to provoke thy abhorrence, rather than to obtain thy regard. O, thou majestic Being! why such mercy to a hardened rebel? why such love to an inveterate enemy? Obligated I am, in the court of conscience, to plead guilty to the complicated charge which thy own righteous law exhibits against me. Motive, or cause, of thy tender regards, I can find none in myself. Thy own sovereign will, thy own free pleasure; these are the only cause why mercy is manifested to me, of sinners the vilest. For should a wretch who is now in hell advance a claim on thy favour, grounded on his own worthiness, I must acknowledge it as well founded as any to which I can pretend. Pride! thou most detestable of all tempers, forever depart from my breast! Humility! thou fairest flower of heavenly origin, thou brightest ornament of the Christian character; be thou my constant companion; be thou the livery in which I shall always appear! Shall a miscreant, who might have been justly doomed to damnation; shall a worthless worm, that is beholden to grace for his all, entertain aspiring thoughts, or assert his own importance! as well might Lucifer himself challenge a seat in paradise. O, my God, let me but view thy electing love in all its freeness, and thy distinguishing favour in all its sovereignty, and I shall be truly humble. Then shall my soul lie low in the dust, and reigning grace shall have the glory of all my salvation. Whatever blessings I now possess, whatever enjoyments I hereafter expect, I freely acknowledge the unrivalled honour

belongs to Thee." Nor is the doctrine maintained less adapted to inflame the heart with sacred love. Love is of God; he, therefore, who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him. Didst Thou, who needest not the services of angels; who art infinitely perfect and infinitely happy in thy own eternal Self, will the elect and regenerate soul say, "didst THOU entertain thoughts of love towards me, before the foundations of the world were laid? Did thy purposes of communicating bliss terminate on a worm so mean, on a wretch so vile? How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! Didst thou record my worthless name in the book of life, and constitute me a member of that mystical body of which Christ is the head? Were my person and all my immortal interests consigned over, by an irreversible grant, into the hands of thy only Son, as the appointed Mediator in order to secure my eternal happiness beyond the possibility of a failure? Didst thou, my God, in the original plan of salvation, provide for the honour of thy justice, as well as the glory of thy grace, by appointing a Surety to perform the obedience to which I am bound, as a creature; and to suffer the punishment that I deserve as a criminal? And, in order to effect the amazing de-nigh, didst thou determine, before I had a being or time commenced, to deliver up the Son of thy love, clothed in humanity, to the stroke of incensed justice, and to the execrable death of the cross? and all this to rescue and save, to ennoble and dignify –what? be astonished, O ye heavens, at this! –a rebellious worm, a despicable insect? elated with pride, anti replete with enmity against Thee, thou greatest and best of Beings! Stupendous goodness! Marvellous grace! O, my God! was I the object of thy eternal choice when viewed by Omniscience as fallen under guilt, and sunk in ruin; loathsome as the dunghill, and abhorrent as hell! and shall not my best affections and warmest love be devoted to Thee? Didst Thou number me among the objects of grace, when thou mightest with honour to thy crown and dignity, as a righteous Governor, have consigned me over to endless perdition; and shall not my heart flame with love to thy adorable name? Didst Thou love and choose me, when deformed and filthy, possessed of dispositions partly brutal, and party diabolical? Art thou infinitely amiable in all thy perfections, and completely righteous in all thy ways, and shall not my very soul love and adore Thee? Hast Thou, of thy mere grace, distinguished me as an object of thy complacential regards; and shall not Thou be the object of my warmest passions and most intense desires? Yes, blessed Lord! Come, possess my heart, and sway my affections! Thine they are, and thine, through grace, they shall ever be. Depart from me, ye rivals of my God! Ye idols of unregenerate hearts, pleasure, wealth, pomp, and power, get you hence! Address me no more with your soft solicitations; entice me no more with your gilded baits. JEHOVAH has condescended to take me for his own: I choose him for my portion, I love him as my all." A devout consideration of this momentous truth is also a noble incentive to gratitude. Gratitude is a delightful disposition, and an amiable temper. It burns in heavenly bosoms, tunes the harps of celestial choirs, and gives the sweetest accent to all their songs. Love to the infinitely amiable God, and gratitude to him for his boundless beneficence; these enter into the essence, of all religion; these are the very life and soul of all intellectual happiness. In proportion, therefore, as these are promoted, the holiness and

comfort of mankind are advanced. That an interest in the election of grace, and a sense of it warm on the heart, are a powerful incentive to the most generous gratitude, we may boldly assert, as we have an authority which none can dispute. Paul, we find, when contemplating the riches of grace in eternal election, breaks out in the following language. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all Spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; ACCORDING AS HE HATH CHOSEN US IN HIM, BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD. Again: We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord; BECAUSE GOD HATH FROM THE BEGINNING CHOSEN YOU TO SALVATION. Such are those grateful acknowledgments the apostle makes, on the behalf of himself and his brethren, to the Author of all good, in reference to their election: and similar will be the sentiments of gratitude in every regenerate heart, in proportion as this important truth is known and experienced. Let us once more listen to the devout addresses and humble acknowledgments of the believer, when bending the suppliant knee before his Father. O Thou, that art infinitely exalted above all blessing and praise! what shall I render to Thee for all thy benefits? Hast Thou, my Father, and Thou, my God, chosen me to holiness, chosen me to eternal life, and that of thy mere grace; and shall not thy glory be the end of all my actions, while I possess either breath or being? Didst Thou enter into an everlasting covenant with the Son of thy love, to save me from final ruin and bring me to immortal bliss; and shall not I freely engage with hand and heart to be thine forever? Thine I am, by right of creation; thine I am, by electing love; and thine I would eternally be, in the performance of every duty, and in the exercise of all my powers. Were the treasures of infinite wisdom displayed in contriving the way, and in appointing the necessary means for my complete felicity; were the stores of unbounded mercy and the riches of sovereign grace, laid open in the eternal counsels of peace on my behalf; and shall not my life, my soul, my everlasting all, that are saved at such an expense, be devoted to Thee? Bind me, O blessed God! for ever bind me to thyself, with the delightful cords of love; that I may never desert thy service, that I may never dishonour thy name. Dishonour THEE? painful thought! May I ever choose to die a thousand deaths, rather than act a part so disingenuous. Hast thou chosen me out of the world? didst thou pity and spare my guilty soul, while numbers were left in their perishing state; and, do not reason and conscience, do not all the sentiments of honour and gratitude of which the human heart is susceptible, conspire with divine revelation to show, that I am laid under infinite obligations to admire thy goodness, and continually to speak thy praise? Such an everlasting and immense distinction as Thou hast made in election, between creatures equally deserving of punishment, challenges from the objects of discriminating love all possible thankfulness. Lord, here I am thy devoted servant! To love and adore thy perfections, to know and perform thy will, be all my delight and all my employ. I bow before thee, and acknowledge myself entirely thine. I give myself entirely to thy disposal, as my only and sovereign Lord. As unformed clay in the hand of the potter, to be moulded and fashioned according to thy own will, I commit myself and all my concerns to Thee. –Such is the salutary tendency of this doctrine, and such the

language of all that are truly acquainted with it, in proportion as faith is in exercise. But, however comfortable this truth may be, to such as are persuaded of their interest in the love of God; is it not adapted to discourage the inquiring soul, and to overwhelm the awakened sinner with desponding fears? Does it not administer abundant occasion for the anxious mind thus to reflect? I know not whether Christ and his salvation be free for me. If I be not of the number of God's elect, I have evidently no interest in him, nor in any thing that he has done. Consequently, how much soever I may desire to believe and be saved by him, I never shall, if not ordained to eternal life. This objection, however plausible it may seem, or however much the conscience of an awakened sinner may be harassed by it, is weak and impertinent. It supposes that a person must know the divine appointment concerning him; that he must, as it were, peruse the eternal roll of God's decrees, and read his name in the book of life, before he can upon solid grounds apply to Christ for salvation. But this is a grand mistake. Let me illustrate the point. When food is presented to a person pinched with hunger, would it be wise, would it be rational for him to hesitate about the propriety of using it, because he does not know whether his Maker has appointed that he shall be nourished by it? though at the same time he well remembers, that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God: and therefore supposing he eat it, without the concurrence of Providence. it will be of no service to him. Would he not rather say; "Meat was made for the use of man: I feel my need: I will endeavour to use it, therefore, as the appointed mean of satisfying my craving appetite, and of supporting my animal frame?" – Now Christ is the bread of life, and the food of our souls. This heavenly food was provided by grace, is exhibited in the gospel, and freely presented to all that hunger, without any exception. What, then, has the awakened sinner to do, but, as the Lord shall enable him, to take, and eat, and live forever? It is very evident, that he has no business to inquire about any further right to partake; since it was not provided for sinners, nor can be of use to them, under any other character, or considered in any other light, than that of miserable objects who are starving for want of spiritual food. According to this doctrine, complete provision is made for the certain salvation of every sinner, however unworthy, who feels his want and applies to Christ. The gospel is not preached to sinners, nor are they encouraged to believe in Jesus, under the formal notion of their being elected. No: these tidings of heavenly mercy are addressed to sinners, considered as ready to perish; and all the blessings of grace are displayed for their immediate relief, as convinced that such are their state and character. All, without any exception of persons, or any regard to worthiness, who apprehend their danger and feel their want, are invited by the Lord Redeemer to a participation of spiritual blessings, previous to any inquiries about their election, that being a following consideration. The order established in the economy of grace, and in reference to this affair, does not require perishing sinners to prove their election before they are permitted, or have any encouragement to trust in Christ for complete deliverance: but, seeing their state, they have all the encouragement which the word of Jehovah can give, without hesitation to rely on the Saviour; and all the assurance which the oath of God can impart, that in so doing they shall obtain pardon for

their sins and peace for their consciences; a freedom from wrath, and the enjoyment of glory. These things are evident from the tenour of divine revelation; and to conceive otherwise proceeds on a mistake of the doctrine, and is followed by an abuse of the truth. Consequently, it administers no real occasion of discouragement or fear, to the inquiring soul or the sensible sinner –to none of the human race, in whose esteem a Saviour from the guilt and power of sin would be precious or welcome. As to those who are dead in sin and unconcerned about their souls, or that have an high opinion of their own righteousness; the Redeemer with all his glory, and the gospel with all its blessings are despised by them, so that they must be out of the question. But may it not be inferred, "that this doctrine is calculated to countenance spiritual sloth, and to encourage licentious practices, in those who conclude that they are in the number of the favoured few?" That none who are so persuaded will find themselves deceived in their expectations, I dare not assert. I will not therefore affirm, that there are no instances of persons professing to believe the evangelical doctrine, and pretending to an interest in the heavenly blessing; who do not abuse the former, and who may not fall infinitely short of the latter. But this I will boldly affirm, that whoever, from such a persuasion, encourages himself in spiritual sloth, or licentious practices, is guilty of basely abusing the doctrine of grace, which, in its own nature, has a directly contrary tendency; and marks himself out as a vessel of eternal wrath, rather than an object of sovereign mercy. Nor can this objection have any force, except it were proved, that the infinitely wise God has appointed the end, but entirely forgotten the means which are necessary to attain and enjoy it. A supposition this, highly unworthy of his character, and contrary to his express declarations. For though the eternal Sovereign had no respect, in the choice of his people, to any thing in them that was worthy of his regard, or to any good works foreseen; yet his professed design in their election was, that they might be holy and without blame before him in love. This being the design of God respecting his chosen, it would be strange indeed, strange to a wonder, if the revelation of his immutable purpose should have a tendency to make them quite the reverse, and prove an incentive to their vilest lust! –It is written, God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation. How? According to this bold objection one would suppose it was in such a way, as allowed them larger scope and greater liberty for gratifying their licentious passions and lawless appetites, than corrupt nature could otherwise have enjoyed –in such a way as pays no regard to the interests of holiness; as makes no provision for the honour of God in a Christian conversation. If this could be proved, the doctrine would deserve the utmost abhor-fence: but it is far from being the case. For the objects of this gracious purpose, we are expressly informed by the oracle of heaven, were chosen to salvation THROUGH SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT, and belief of the truth. Sanctification of the Spirit may be considered not only as an appointed and honourable mean of attaining that exalted end, the salvation of the soul and the glory of God; but also as an essential part of that salvation to which they were chosen, which is begun on earth and completed in glory. Taken in either view, it is obvious that this instructive and important text is a full proof that the objection alleged is quite impertinent, and entirely void of truth to support it. Consequently,

that those who make it are influenced either by gross ignorance or inveterate prejudice. For hence it appears, that the holiness and the happiness of God's people are equally secured by the Divine purpose. Besides, those, and those only, who live by faith on Jesus Christ, and walk in the ways of obedience, have any evidence that they are the elect of God. In proportion, therefore, as they lose sight of the glorious object of their dependence, and deviate from the paths of holiness, they lose sight of their interest in distinguishing love. So that their inward peace and spiritual joy are greatly concerned in a pious conduct. Nor is the following objection, so frequently and violently urged, any more to the purpose. "If this doctrine be true," say our opponents, "there is little or no occasion for the use of means, in order to attain salvation. For if we are elected, we shall be saved without them; and if not, they will prove abortive. On such a supposition, all our prayers, and tears, and strivings; all our circumspection and self-denial, will be of no avail. We may, therefore, as well take our ease and rest contented, A profession of religion is an useless thing: for the final event is fixed by a predestinating God, and who shall reverse it?" This objection agrees with the former, in supposing that the end is decreed without regard to the means. A palpable fallacy, and pregnant with great absurdities. Let us apply the principle, on which the objection proceeds, to the common affairs of life. I take it for granted, that there is a superintending Providence over all human affairs, over all our minutest concerns. If so, either the great Ruler of the world from everlasting determined what he would do, in all that infinite variety of circumstances in which any of his creatures should ever exist, or he did not. If not, innumerable millions of new determination must have arisen in the eternal Mind since the world began, respecting his conduct toward his creatures; or he must have acted without any prior determination at all, and so without a plan; neither of which corresponds with our ideas of an infinitely perfect Agent. If he did, from eternity, determine upon his conduct, and form the extensive plan of his future operations respecting rational creatures; then, it is evident, the objection lies with equal force against our using means, or exerting endeavours, in order to obtain any promising advantage, or to avoid any threatening evil in common life, as it does against making use of means in the important concerns of our souls, and in reference to a future world. For it is absurd to suppose, that the Divine purpose can be made void, any more in the one case than in the other. According to this way of arguing, trade and commerce, the labours of husbandry, and all the employments of life, must be at a stand. For who, among all the busy mortals on earth, can foretell the event, or ascertain success? Who can tell, however promising the prospect, but Jehovah's purposes may render all his contrivances and all his painful industry entirely fruitless? Nay, further, upon this principle, we must not eat our common food, nor seek the needful refreshments of sleep; for it must be confessed, that we are absolutely ignorant what the purposes of God may be, as to the event, in either case. If it be his determination that we shall enjoy health and vigour, what occasion for the one or the other? and if not, what good will they do us? For his purpose shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure, But who, notwithstanding this, ever took it into his head to adopt the principle, and thus to apply it, in affairs of the present life I None, surely, but a fool, or a

madman. While we have our sober senses in exercise, however firmly we may believe the existence of eternal decrees; or however clearly we may discern the interposition of providence, on ten thousand different occasions; we never suppose that those everlasting purposes, or these providential interpositions, were designed to supersede the use of means, or had, as to the concerns of time, any such tendency. Why, then, should we strive to separate the end from the means, in things of infinitely greater importance? The dictates of inspiration, the maxims of philosophy, the principles of common sense, and the general conduct of mankind, all unite in utterly disallowing such a procedure, as irrational and absurd to the last degree. This objection militates no less against the infallible foreknowledge of God, than against his purpose. For Jehovah is perfect in knowledge. That knowledge which is absolutely perfect can admit of no increase. All the volitions, therefore, of moral agents, and all the events consequent upon them, were from eternity present to the Divine Mind, and open to his omniscient eye. And as every thing future was included in his allcomprehending view, before the world began; so it would be absurd to suppose that any event should ever take place, otherwise than as He foresaw it. With equal reason, therefore, might the objector infer from the Divine prescience, that the use of means to attain any end is vain, as from the doctrine of predestination. For between the foreknowledge and the purpose of God there is a close and inseparable connexion. To illustrate the point, and to apply the argument. Admitting the perfect foreknowledge of God, the objector may thus argue against the use of means, respecting his eternal state, "The foreknowledge of God is perfect. From eternity he viewed my final state. Either he foresaw me seated on a throne of bliss, and exulting in a sense of his favour; or loaded with chains of darkness, and groaning in the agonies of endless despair. As he from eternity viewed me, so it must inevitably be; for perfect foreknowledge is infallible. My eternal state is therefore a fixed point with the Deity. What need then of the use of means to avoid punishment, or to obtain felicity? Prayer and watchfulness, all the exercises and all the duties of a painful profession, are entirely in vain. If the omniscient foresaw me happy in the future world, I cannot be miserable. If he foresaw me miserable, I shall not, I cannot be happy; though all the angels in heaven, and all the men upon earth, were to afford me their united aid." This argument, I humbly conceive, wears the face of probability to as great a degree, and infers the objection I am now refuting with as much propriety and force, as that which is formed, and the inference from it, against the decree of election. But the truth is, neither that nor this has the least force or propriety. For as Jehovah, when he decreed the end, appointed the means and the application of them to their respective objects; so, in his eternal prescience, he not only viewed the end, but also foresaw the means, with their application and use, as connected with the final event. As he foresaw none in the abodes of darkness, but those whom he viewed as guilty, and as walking in the ways of destruction; so he determined to bring none to glory, except in a way becoming himself as perfectly holy, and by the use of means which grace should render effectual. Hence it appears, that the objector must either give up his argument, or deny that his Maker is perfect; which would be to undeify the God that is above.

This, indeed, with a bold impiety many have done, in order to support their favourite notions about free-agency and the liberty of the human will, in opposition to the doctrine of sovereign grace, and of Divine predestination: being well aware, that whoever allows the eternal and perfect foreknowledge of God, cannot consistently deny his decrees respecting the final state of men. This the Socinians have freely acknowledged. Admitting, say they, the infallible prescience of all future contingencies, CALVIN'S doctrine of the predestination of some, by name, to life, and of others to death, cannot be refuted. (Apud WITSIUM, (Econ. Faed. l. iii. c. iv. § 12) They therefore do their utmost endeavour to prove (horrid to think!) that He who formed and governs the universe, is not possessed of such a foresight, in other words, that he is not God. This they do, by much the same arguments that others use, in opposition to the doctrine here maintained. To the foregoing objections some, perhaps, may be ready to add, with an air of confidence; "Does not this doctrine, in its inseparable connexions, represent the Most High as partial in his conduct towards his creatures, and as a respecter of persons? as dealing hardly, if not unjustly, with far the greater part of mankind?" In answer to which I observe, that as to the charge of partiality and respect of persons, here exhibited against the Divine conduct, it is entirely void of the least foundation. For wherever such a charge may be advanced with propriety against the conduct of any one, it must be in the affairs of remunerative, or of punishing justice, and where the rules of equity are more or less transgressed; but cannot possibly have place in matters of sovereign favour and mere bounty, of which kind is election. For instance: if we consider a person in the capacity of a magistrate, as invested with the executive power of the criminal laws of his country, and behold him inflicting upon such offenders as are poor, and mean, and of little account in the world, the penalties annexed to their respective crimes; while he suffers others of nobler birth, of more elevated rank, and of affluent circumstances, to escape with impunity; we have great reason to remonstrate against such a procedure, as a culpable partiality, a criminal respect of persons, and as no other than a perversion of justice. But if we consider the same person under the character of a benefactor, and behold him dispensing his favours among his indigent neighbours, in order to relieve their wants and render them happy; we never imagine that he is under any obligation to show an equal regard to all that are distressed with poverty. Supposing he distribute his bounty in great variety to the favoured objects of his beneficence; nay, supposing he indulge some with favours, while others, who stand in the same need, are entirely overlooked; shall we arraign his conduct, and call him a respecter of persons? By no means. For were that the case, there would be nothing indecent, if, after he had manifested his beneficent regards to some, others were to come with a commanding voice, and require his assistance in the same way, and to the same degree; than which nothing can be more impertinent. Besides, though men are under obligation to love and assist one another; though, being only stewards of what they possess, they are accountable to the Supreme Judge for the manner in which they use their faculties, their time, and all their talents; yet God has the most perfect right to do what he will with his own. For no creature, and especially no offending creature, has any claim upon

his bounty. If Jehovah must be denominated a respecter of persons, and his conduct pronounced partial on supposition that he loved and chose some to everlasting happiness, while he rejected others and left them to perish under his righteous curse; if the equity of his proceedings, in the affairs of grace, must be called in question, because he bestows eternal blessings on some, and entirely withholds them from others; how shall we vindicate the methods of Providence in ten thousand different instances? Does not God, as to the concerns of religion, afford those means of grace, his word and ordinances, to some, while they are entirely withheld from others? and where they are enjoyed, does he not regenerate and sanctify some by the Spirit of truth, while others, who have the same external means, continue in spiritual darkness, and finally perish? If, then, the uncontrollable God may do that in time for some, which he is under no obligation to do for any; none can doubt whether he might from eternity form such a resolution: for Divine Providence is nothing but the execution of God's eternal purpose. Similar to this is the conduct of God toward mankind, as to temporal things. For nothing is more evident, than that the Supreme Governor of the world is liberal in communicating enjoyments of every kind to some; while others, not more unworthy, are all their lives exposed to the greatest distresses. And though there is a vast disparity between temporal and eternal blessings, yet, if to distinguish between his creatures, in bestowing or in withholding the latter, would any way impeach his character; it must in proportion do so in the former. For the Judge of all the earth must do right. And as none can, without open blasphemy, quarrel with the sovereign dispensations of Providence, on account of that difference which subsists between one man and another in the present life: so none should indulge a captious humour in finding fault with the methods of grace, because their Maker does not manifest an equal regard to all. Nor can it be inferred from any thing implied in this doctrine, that our eternal Sovereign deals hardly, much less unjustly, with any part of mankind. Here let me ask the objector, and let him ask his own conscience; Have all mankind sinned? Is sin a transgression of Divine law? Is the law they have broken, righteous, just in its requisitions, and equitable in its penalty? If so, every man is guilty before God, and every mouth should be stopped: for all have deserved to die; to perish; to be destroyed with an utter destruction. Either these things are acknowledged as undoubted truths, or the authority of the Bible is rejected. These truths being admitted, reason itself must allow, that if all mankind had perished under a curse, the honour of their Maker, as the Supreme Governor and righteous Judge, must have been unimpeached. But if so, it is impossible to conceive how his choosing some to life and happiness, and his rejecting others, can afford the least occasion for the charge suggested in the objection. For the election of those whom God determined to save, does not injure the non-elect. Their situation would not have been at all the better, if none had been chosen, nor any saved. For non-election is not a punishment; it is only the withholding a free favour, which the sovereign Lord of all may bestow on whomsoever he pleases. When the whole world is considered as guilty before God, we must allow that he had an unlimited right to determine about the final state of men. He was at perfect liberty to determine whether he would save any, or not. He might have left all to perish,

or he might have decreed the salvation of all. Or, he might purpose to save some, and reject others: and, so determining, he might love and save, he might condemn and punish, whom he pleased. Surely, then, it cannot be absurd in reason, or inconsistent with the Divine character, to suppose that he actually has chosen some to infinite glory, and determined to punish others according to their demerit. To acknowledge that all have sinned against God, forfeited his favour, and deserve to perish; and at the same time to suppose, that he might not leave what number he pleased to condemnation and wrath, imply a contradiction. For those who might not be rejected, whether more or fewer, must have a claim on Jehovah's favour; consequently, not justly liable to perish, which is contrary to the supposition. It is eternally fit that God should order all things according to his own pleasure. His infinite greatness, majesty, and glory, certainly entitle him to act as an uncontrollable Sovereign, and that his will should in all things take place. He is worthy, supremely worthy, of making his own glory the end of all that he does; and that he should make nothing but the dictates of his own wisdom, and the determinations of his own will, his rule in pursuing that end, without asking leave or counsel of any creature, and without giving an account of any of his matters. It is quite agreeable, that He who is infinitely wise and absolutely perfect, should order all things according to his own will; even things of the greatest importance, such as the complete salvation, or the eternal damnation of sinners. It is right that He should thus be sovereign, because he is the first, the eternal Being, and the fountain of existence. He is the Creator of all things, and they are universally dependent upon him; it is, therefore, entirely consistent with his character, that he should act as the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. If the objection under consideration were founded in truth, God could not exercise mercy in his own right, nor would the blessing's of grace be his own to give. For that of which he may not dispose as he pleases, is not his own, he cannot make a present of it to any of his creatures, they having a claim upon it; for it is absurd to talk of giving to any one that to which he had a right in equity. But what would this objection make of God? Must the High and Lofty One be so circumscribed in the exercise of his grace, that he cannot manifest it at his own pleasure in bestowing his gifts; but if he dispense them to one, must be obliged to give them to another, or be obnoxious to the charge of partiality and cruelty? Shocking to think! The very thought is blasphemy. This impious imagination arises, absurd as it is, from the high opinion we form of ourselves, and the diminutive thoughts we entertain of our Maker. But why should the objector be so much concerned about the honour of Divine justice, in the conduct of God toward mankind, on supposition that he has chosen some and rejected others? Why should he not be as much concerned lest the glory of his Maker should suffer a stain, by the final rejection of all the angels that sinned and fell from their first estate? Certainly, there is equal, if not superior reason. Why, then, does he not plead the cause of those old apostates, those damned spirits, and quarrel with God because he hath shown more regard to fallen men than to fallen angels? Yet he is under no pain on their account; nor does he suspect that the Divine character will lose any part of its glory, because they are all, without one exception, the objects of Jehovah's eternal vengeance—but, very likely, he concludes that they deserve to be

damned. True: and is it not so with men? If not –how shall I speak it? the law of God is unrighteous, for it denounces damnation as the desert of sin: the vicarious death of Christ was an unnecessary and shocking event; the capital parts of the Bible are unworthy of the least regard, and the distinguishing doctrines of Christianity are no better than a dream, a fable –a gross imposition on all who believe them. Without admitting this fundamental truth, that men, considered as guilty creatures, deserve to perish forever; we can behold neither equity in the law, nor grace in the gospel. The eternal rectitude of the great Lawgiver, and the amiable glories of the wonderful Saviour, are quite obscured; while the whole economy of redemption, as revealed in Scripture, is thrown into the utmost confusion. Consequently, the objector has no alternative, but either to give up his point, or blaspheme his Maker. The truth maintained may now be considered by way of improvement, as it respects the careless sinner and the real Christian. –

As it respects the careless sinner. Is this your character, reader? If so, it is happily adapted to strike your conscience and alarm your fears; to arouse your lethargic soul, and awaken your inquiries after eternal blessedness. You have seen that it is a righteous thing with God, to execute justice on all who are guilty; and that, if he had left all mankind to perish, none would have had any reason to complain. Now, though he has, of his mere goodness, chosen a number of the fallen race, and determined to bring them to glory; yet millions are left to suffer the awful desert of their crimes. How, then, do you know but this may be your case? Remember, thoughtless mortal! that if you be rejected of God, you are lost forever. And are you still unconcerned about your soul? then the sentence of a broken law, and the wrath of an awful Judge, abide upon you. You are in the hands of an offended God, and, shocking to think! you are at a dreadful uncertainty what he will do with you. You are, it may be, sometimes afraid what will become of you; afraid lest you should have your portion in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Yes, and be it known to you, that while you are habitually careless about your eternal interests, and a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God, you have reason to fear. Your apprehensions of eternal punishment have a real foundation. You have reason to tremble every moment. But you will do well to remember, that though you be ever so much afraid of the final event; though everlasting damnation be ever so dreadful, yet it is what you have deserved. Your injured Maker and affronted Sovereign may inflict it upon you, and be righteous, and holy, and glorious in it. However dreadful it now is, in your apprehension; or however intolerable it would be to you in the execution; yet, in regard to God, neither the one nor the other can render it the less righteous. You should remember, sinner, that your Maker sustains the character of a universal Sovereign, and of a righteous Judge. His honour, therefore, is deeply concerned in punishing the guilty. Though damnation be worse than the loss of being, yet you have no reason to complain of injustice; except you can form a perfect estimate of what degree of guilt attends innumerable acts of rebellion against unlimited authority, infinite majesty, and boundless perfection, and, upon a just comparison of the degree of guilt, with the intenseness and duration of the punishment, pronounce them unequal. But who can tell to what an enormous height the guilt of one single act of rebellion against infinite Majesty

must arise in the boundless empire of God? We may boldly affirm, that none but the omniscient –none but he who is possessed of that peerless majesty, can solve the question. Meditate on these awful truths; and may the Lord enable you to flee from the wrath to come! (Hence it appears, that as the doctrine of God's general and equal love to mankind, and the sentiment of universal redemption, are too evidently calculated to lull the conscience asleep, under a false presumption of interest in the Redeemer and of happiness by him. where there is no evidence of love to God and his ways; so the doctrine of distinguishing grace, and of the Mediator's substitution in the stead of his chosen seed, has an obvious tendency to alarm the careless sinner and to awaken the drowsy formalist.) Does my reader profess to believe and embrace this divine truth? Has he tasted that the Lord is gracious and is he a real Christian? This doctrine informs him whence his happiness flows, and to whom the glory is due. Hence he learns, that grace is an absolute sore-reign; that she dispenses her favours to whomsoever she pleases, without being subject to the least control. Here she appears, maintaining her rights and asserting her ho-Hours, with a grandeur becoming herself. Yes, reader, this doctrine presents you with GRACE ON THE THRONE; while, as an herald, with a friendly importunity and a commanding voice, it cries in your ear, Bow THE KNEE! And as this doctrine presents you with a view of grace in its sovereign glory; so it points out the objects of eternal love as in a state of the utmost security. For who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? To know your interest in the election of grace, is therefore a matter of great importance: and that such knowledge is attainable, is evident from that exhortation of the Holy Ghost: Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure; sure to your own mind, and satisfactory to your own conscience. That such a persuasion, grounded on truth, is intimately connected with a Christian's peace and joy, is beyond a doubt. Nor is there any other difficulty in attaining the certainty, than what attends a well-founded persuasion of our being called by grace. Whoever has reason to conclude that he is called by the gospel and converted to Christ, may, from the very same premises, infer his election. For none but those that were chosen to life and happiness are born of God, or believe in Christ. If then you espouse the doctrine, you should not be satisfied with merely avowing the sentiment as an article of your belief; but should consider it as a truth according to godliness, and seek the advantage resulting from it. For you will find it of little avail, that you have adopted the sentiment into your theological system, if you experience no benefit from it, in a way of humility and love, of consolation and joy. Viewed in such a connexion with experimental religion, you should meditate on it: considered as thus important, you should endeavour to vindicate it from the hateful charges of the sons of pride. Are you, on divine authority, not only convinced that the doctrine is true, but also persuaded of your interest in the love it reveals? Remember the exalted privileges to which you are chosen. Chosen you are, to a participation of grace, with all its immense donations to the fruition of glory, with all its eternal felicity. Regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and perseverance in faith; these, Christian, with all that inconceivable bliss which results from the enjoyment of God himself, are the blessings designed for you in the decree of

election. Surely, then, with such blessings in hand, and such prospects in view, it is but reasonable that you should be entirely devoted to God, and live his obedient servant. If gratitude have any persuasive energy, or if love have any constraining influence, here they should operate with all their force. Henceforth the glory of God and the ho-hour of that adorable Person, by whose mediation you come to enjoy these wonderful favours, should be your main concern, and the end of all your actions. Remember the honourable character conferred upon you in the sacred writings. Among those names of distinction which the people of God bear, that of the elect is none of the least remarkable. Of this character the Spirit of wisdom reminds believers, when he urges upon them the duties to which they are called. Ye are a chosen generation, a peculiar people. Would we know to what end they are chosen, and why they are a people distinguished from others, as God's peculiar property? the following words inform us. That ye should show forth the praises of Him, who, as a fruit of his electing love, hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Here the Christian's duty in general, and to perform it should be his Constant business: for he was chosen in Christ, that he might be holy and without blame before him in love. Or, is my reader one of those to whom the remark would be applicable; "This man entertains high notions in religion, and pretends to sublime attainments in knowledge. Eternal purposes and absolute sovereignty, unchangeable love, and distinguishing grace, are his favourite topics: yet he lives in open neglect of the plainest precepts, and of the most important duties. While pride and covetousness, wrath and malice, with various other unsanctified tempers, govern his conduct and render him a scandal to Christianity." The very thought of such a reflection is grieving to godly persons: for lamentable is the state of that professor to whom it may be justly applied! You may dispute as long as you please, in vindication of divine sovereignty in the affairs of grace; but it will be to little purpose, as to yourself. Because it is plain that you are an enemy in your heart, and a rebel in your life against that infinite Sovereign whose rights you pretend to maintain. By such a neglect of his precepts and such a transgression of his laws, you virtually deny his absolute authority, and renounce his supreme dominion. Sinful appetites are the law you obey, and carnal pleasure the end you pursue; while your Maker and Lord has neither the affection of your heart, nor the service of your hands. May that omnipotent, sovereign grace, of which you talk without any experience, deliver and save your sinking soul! For, verily, it would be hard to find a more shocking character out of hell.

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