Freedom of the Will

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Part II.

WHEREIN IT IS CONSIDERED WHETHER THERE IS OR CAN BE ANY SORT OF FREEDOM OF WILL, AS THAT WHEREIN ARMINIANS PLACE THE ESSENCE OF THE LIBERTY OF ALL MORAL AGENTS; AND WHETHER ANY SUCH THING EVER WAS OR CAN BE CONCEIVED OF.

Section 11.

The evidence of God's certain Foreknowledge of the volitions of moral Agents.

THAT the acts of the Wills of moral Agents are not contingent events, in such a sense, as to be without all necessity, appears by God’s certain Foreknowledge of such events.

In handling this argument, I would in the first place prove, that God has a certain Foreknowledge of the voluntary acts of moral Agents; and secondly, show the consequence, or how it follows from hence, that the Volitions of moral Agents are not contingent, so as to be without necessity of connexion and consequence.

First, I am to prove, that God has an absolute and certain Foreknowledge of the free actions of moral Agents.

One would think it wholly needless to enter on such an argument with any that profess themselves Christians: but so it is; God’s certain Foreknowledge of the free acts of moral Agents, is denied by some that pretend to believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God; and especially of late. I therefore shall consider the evidence of such a prescience in the Most High, as fully as the designed limits of this essay will admit; — supposing myself herein to have to do with such as own the truth of the Bible.

Arg. I. My first argument shall be taken from God’s prediction of such events. Here I would, in the first place, lay down these two things as axioms.

1. If God does not foreknow, He cannot foretell such events; that is, He cannot peremptorily and certainly foretell them. If God has no more than an uncertain guess concerning events of this kind, then he can declare no more than an uncertain guess. Positively to foretell, is to profess to foreknow, or declare positive Foreknowledge.
If God does not certainly foreknow the future Volitions of moral Agents, then neither can he certainly foreknow those events which are dependent on these Volitions. The existence of the one depending on the existence of the other, the knowledge of the existence of the one depends on the knowledge of the existence of the other; and the one cannot be more certain than the other.

Therefore, how many, how great, and how extensive soever the consequences of the Volitions of moral Agents may be; though they should extend to an alteration of the state of things through the universe, and should be continued in a series of successive events to all eternity, and should in the progress of things branch forth into an infinite number of series, each of them going on in an endless chain of events; God must be as ignorant of all these consequences, as he is of the Volition whence they first take their rise: and the whole state of things depending on them, how important, extensive, and vast soever, must be hid from him.

These positions being such as, I suppose, none will deny, I now proceed to observe the following things. 1. Men’s moral conduct and qualities, their virtues and vices, their wickedness and good practice, things rewardable and punishable, have often been foretold by God.—Pharaoh’s moral conduct, in refusing to obey God’s command, in letting his people go, was foretold. God says to Moses, Exod. iii. 19. “I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go.” Here God professes not only to guess at, but to know Pharaoh’s future disobedience. In chap. vii. 4. God says, “but Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that I may lay mine hand upon Egypt,” &c. And chap. ix. 30. Moses says to Pharaoh, “as for thee, and thy servants, I Know that ye will not fear the Lord.” See also chap. xi. 9.—The moral conduct of Josiah, by name, in his zealously exerting himself to oppose idolatry, in particular acts, was foretold above three hundred years before he was born, and the prophecy sealed by a miracle, and renewed and confirmed by the words of a second prophet, as what surely would not fail, (1 Kings xiii. 1 – 6, 32.) This prophecy was also in effect a prediction of the moral conduct of the people, in upholding their schismatical and idolatrous worship until that time, and the idolatry of those priests of the high places, which it is foretold Josiah should offer upon that altar of Bethel. Micah foretold the foolish and sinful conduct of Ahab, in refusing to hearken to the word of the Lord by him, and choosing rather to hearken to the false prophets, in going to Ramoth Gilead to his ruin, (1 King’s xxi. 20 – 22.) The moral conduct of Hazael was foretold, in that cruelty he should be guilty of; on which Hazael says, “what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing!” The prophet speaks of the event as what be knew, and not what he conjectured, 2 Kings viii. 12. “I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: Thou wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.” The moral conduct of Cyrus is foretold, long before he had a being, in his mercy to God’s people, and regard to the true God, in turning the captivity of the Jews, and promoting the building of the temple, (Isa. xliv. 28. and lxv. 13. compare 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23. and Ezra i. 1 – 4.) How many instances of the moral conduct of the kings of the North and South, particular instances of the wicked behaviour of the kings of Syria and Egypt, are foretold in the 11th chapter of Daniel! Their corruption, violence, robbery, treachery, and lies. And particularly, how much is foretold of the horrid wickedness of Antiochus Epiphanes, called there “a vile person,” instead of Epiphones, or illustrious! In
that chapter, and also in chap. viii. ver. 9, 14, 23, to the end, are foretold his flattery, deceit, and lies, his having "his heart set to do mischief," and set "against the holy covenant," his “destroying and treading under foot the holy people,” in a marvellous manner, his “having indignation against the holy covenant, setting his heart against it, and conspiring against it,” his “polluting the sanctuary of strength, treading it under foot, taking away the daily sacrifice, and placing the abomination that maketh desolate;” his great pride, “magnifying himself against God, and uttering marvellous blasphemies against Him,” until God in indignation should destroy him. Withal, the moral conduct of the Jews, on occasion of his persecution, is predicted. It is foretold, that “he should corrupt many by flatteries,” (chap. xi. 32 – 34.) But that others should behave with a glorious constancy and fortitude, in opposition to him, (ver. 32.) And that some good men should fall and repent, (ver. 35,) Christ foretold Peter’s sin, in denying his Lord, with its circumstances, in a peremptory manner. And so, that great sin of Judas, in betraying his master, and its dreadful and eternal punishment in hell, was foretold in the like positive manner, Matt. xxvi. 21 – 25, and parallel places in the other Evangelists.

2. Many events have been foretold by God, which are dependent on the moral conduct of particular persons, and were accomplished, either by their virtuous or vicious actions. Thus, the children of Israel’s going down into Egypt to dwell there, was foretold to Abraham,, (Gen. xv.) which was brought about by the wickedness of Joseph.’s brethren in selling him, and the wickedness of Joseph’s mistress, and his own signal virtue in resisting her temptation. The accomplishment of the thing prefigured in Joseph’s dream, depended on the same moral conduct. Jotham’s parable and prophecy, (Judges ix. 15 – 20.) was accomplished by the wicked conduct of Abimelech, and the men of Shechem. The prophecies against the house of Eli, (1 Sam. chap. ii. and iii.) were accomplished by the wickedness of Doeg the Edomite, in accusing the priests; and the great impiety, and extreme cruelty of Saul in destroying the priests at Nob (1 Sam. xxii.) Nathan’s prophecy against David, (2 Sam. xii. 11, 12.) was fulfilled by the horrible wickedness of Absalom, in rebelling against his father, seeking his life, and lying with his concubines in the sight of the sun. The prophecy against Solomon, (1 Kings xi. 11 – 13.) was fulfilled by Jeroboam’s rebellion and usurpation, which are spoken of as his wickedness, (2 Chron. xiii. 5, 6. compare ver. 18.) The prophecy against Jeroboam’s family, (1 Kings xiv.) was fulfilled by the conspiracy, treason, and cruel murders of Bassha, (2 Kings 15.27 &c.). The predictions of the prophet Jehu against the house of Bassha, (1 Kings xvi. at the beginning,) were fulfilled by the treason and parricide of Zimri, (1 Kings xvi. 9 – 13, 20.)

3. How often has God foretold the future moral conduct of nations and people, of numbers, bodies, and successions of men; with God’s judicial proceedings, and many other events consequence and dependent on their virtues and vices; which could not be foreknown, if the Volitions of men, wherein they acted as moral Agents, had not been foreseen! The future cruelty of the Egyptians in oppressing Israel, and God’s judging and punishing them for it, was foretold long before it came to pass, (Gen. xv. 13, 14.) The continuance of the iniquity of the Amorites, and the increase of it until it should be full, and they ripe for destruction, was foretold above four hundred years before, (Gen. xv. 16. Acts vii. 6, 7.) The prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the land of
Judah, were absolute; (2 Kings xx. 17 – 19. chap. xxii. 15, to the end). It was foretold in Hezekiah’s time, and was abundantly insisted on in the book of the prophet Isaiah, who wrote nothing after Hezekiah’s days. It was foretold in Josiah’s time, in the beginning of a great reformation, (2 Kings xxii.) And it is manifest by innumerable things in the predictions of the prophets, relating to this event, its time, its circumstances, its continuance, and end; the return from the captivity, the restoration of the temple, city, and land, &c. I say, these show plainly, that the prophecies of this great event were absolute. And yet this event was connected with, and dependent on, two things in men’s moral conduct: first, the injurious rapine and violence of the king of Babylon and his people, as the efficient cause; which God often speaks of as what He Highly resented, and would severely punish; and secondly, the final obstinacy of the Jews. That great event is often spoken of as suspended on this, (Jer. iv. 1 and v. 1, vii. 1 – 7. xi. 1 – 6. xvii. 24, to the end, xxv. 1 – 7. xxvi. 1 – 8, 13. and xxxviii. 17, 18.) Therefore this destruction and captivity could not be foreknown, unless such a moral conduct of the Chaldeans and Jews had been foreknown. And then it was foretold, that the people should he finally obstinate, to the utter desolation of the city and land, (Isa. vi. 9 – 11 Jer. i. 18, 19. vii. 27 – 29. Ezek. iii. 7. and xxiv. 13, 14.)

The final obstinacy of those Jews who were left in the land of Israel, in their idolatry and rejection of the true God, was foretold by him, and the prediction confirmed with an oath, (Jer. xliiv. 26, 27.) And God tells the people, (Isa. xlviii. 3, 4 – 8.) that he had predicted those things which should be consequent on their treachery and obstinacy, because he knew they would be obstinate; and that he had declared these things beforehand, for their conviction of his being the only true God, &c.

The destruction of Babylon, with many of the circumstances of it, was foretold, as the judgment of God for the exceeding pride and haughtiness of the heads of that monarchy, Nebuchadnezzar and his successors, and their wickedly destroying other nations, and particularly for their exalting themselves against the true God and his people, before any of these monarchs had a being; (Isa. chap. xiii. xiv. xlvii. compare Habak. ii. 5, to the end, and Jer. chap. i. and ii.) That Babylon’s destruction was to be “a recompense, according to the works of their own hands,” appears by Jer. xxi. 14.— The immorality of which the people of Babylon, and particularly her princes and great men, were guilty, that very night that the city was destroyed, their reveling and drunkenness at Belshazzar’s idolatrous feast, was foretold, Jer. li. 39, 57.)

The return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity is often very particularly foretold, with many circumstances, and the promises of it are very peremptory: (Jer. xxxi. 35 – 40. and xxxii. 6 – 15, 41 – 44. and xxxiii. 24 – 26.) And the very time of their return was prefixed; (Jer. xxv. 11, 12. and xxix. 10, 11. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21. Ezek. iv. 6. and Dan. ix. 2.) And yet the prophecies represent their return as consequent on their repentance. And their repentance itself is very expressly and particularly foretold, (Jer. xxix. 12, 13. xxxi. 8, 9, 18 – 31. xxxiii. 8. i. 4, 5. Ezek. vi. 8, 9, 10. vii. 16. xiv. 22, 23. and xx. 43, 44.)
It was foretold under the Old Testament, that the Messiah should suffer greatly through the malice and cruelty of men; as is largely and fully set forth, Psal. xxii. applied to Christ in the New Testament, (Matt. xxvii. 35, 43. Luke xxiii. 34. John xix. 24. Heb. ii. 12.) And likewise in Psal. lxix. which, it is also evident by the New Testament, is spoken of Christ; (John xv. 25. vii. 5, &c. and ii. 17. Rom. xv. 3. Matt. xxvii. 34, 48. Mark xv. 23. John xix. 29.) The same thing is also foretold, Isa. iiiii. and l. 6. and Mic. v. 1. This cruelty of men was their sin, and what they acted as moral Agents. It was foretold, that there should be an union of heathen and Jewish rulers against Christ, (Psal. ii. 1, 2. compared with Acts iv. 25 – 28.) It was foretold, that the Jew should generally reject and despise the Messiah, (Isa. xlix. 5, 6, 7. and lii. 1 – 3. Psal. xxii. 6, 7 and lxix. 4, 8, 19, 20.) And it was foretold, that the body of that nation should be rejected in the Messiah’s days, from being God’s people, for their obstinacy in sin; (Isa. xlix. 4 — 7. and viii. 14, 15, 16. compared with Rom. x. 19. and Isa. 1iv. at the beginning, compared with Rom. x. 20, 21.) It was foretold, that Christ should be rejected by the chief priests and rulers among the Jews, (Psal. cxviii. 22. compared with Matt. xxi. 42. Acts iv. 11. Pet. ii. 4, 7.)

Christ himself foretold his being delivered into the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and his being cruelly treated by them, and condemned to death; and that he by them should be delivered to the Gentiles: and that he should be mocked and scourged, and crucified, (Matt. xvi. 21. and xx. 17 – 19. Luke ix. 22. John viii. 28.) and that the people should be concerned in and consenting to his death, (Luke xx. 13 – 18.) especially the inhabitants of Jerusalem; (Luke xiii. 33 – 35.) He foretold, that the disciples should all be offended because of him, that night in which he was betrayed, and should forsake him; (Matt. xxvi. 31. John xvi. 32.) He foretold, that he should be rejected of that generation, even the body of the people, and that they should continue obstinate to their ruin; (Matt. xii. 45. xxi. 33 – 42. and xxii. 1 – 7. Luke xiii. 16, 21, 24. xvii. 25. xix. 14, 27, 41, 44. xx. 13 – 18. and xxiii. 34 — 39.)

As it was foretold in both the Old Testament and the New that the Jews should reject the Messiah, so it was foretold that the Gentiles should receive him, and so be admitted to the privileges of God’s people; in places too many to be now particularly mentioned. It was foretold in the Old Testament, that the Jews should envy the Gentiles on this account; (Deut. xxxvii. 21. compared with Rom. x. 19.) Christ himself often foretold, that the Gentiles would embrace the true religion, and become his followers and people; (Matt. viii. 10, 11. xii. 41 – 43. and xxii. 8 – 10. Luke xiii. 28. xiv. 16 – 24. and xx. 16. John x. 16.) He also foretold the Jews envy of the Gentiles on this occasion; (Matt. xx. 12 — 16. Luke xv. 26, to the end.) He foretold, that they should continue in this opposition and envy, and should manifest it in the cruel persecutions of his followers, to their utter destruction; (Matt. xxi. 33 – 42. xxii. 6. and xxiii. 34 – 39 Luke xi. 49 – 51.) The obstinacy of the Jews is also foretold, (Acts xxii. 18.) Christ often foretold the great persecutions his followers should meet with, both from Jews and Gentiles; (Matt. x. 16 – 18, 21, 22, 34 – 36. and xxiv. 9. Mark xiii. 9. Luke x. 3. xii. 11, 49 – 53. and xxi. 12, 16, 17. John xv. 18 – 21. and xvi. 1 – 4. 20 – 22, 23.) He foretold the martyrdom of particular persons; (Matt. xx. 23. John xiii. 36. and xxi. 18, 19, 22.) He foretold the great success of the gospel in the city of Samaria, as near approaching; which afterwards was fulfilled by the preaching of Philip. (John iv. 35 – 38.) He foretold the rising of many
deceivers after his departure, (Matt. xxiv. 4, 5, 11.) and the apostasy of many of his
professed followers; (Matt. xxiv. 10, 12.)

The persecutions, which the apostle Paul was to meet with in the world, were foretold;
29, 30.) “I know, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not
sparing the flock; also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to
draw away disciples after them.” The apostle says, he knew this: but he did not know it,
if God did not know the future actions of moral Agents.

4. Unless God foreknows the future acts of moral Agents, all the prophecies we have in
Scripture concerning the great Antichristian apostasy; the rise, reign, wicked qualities,
and deeds of “the man of sin,” and his instruments and adherents; the extent and long
continuance of his dominion, his influence on the minds of princes and others, to corrupt
them, and draw them away to idolatry, and other foul vices; his great and cruel
persecutions; the behaviour of the saints under these great temptations, &c. &c. I say,
unless the Volitions of moral Agents are foreseen, all these prophecies are uttered
without knowing the things foretold.

The predictions relating to this great apostasy are all of a moral nature, relating to men’s
virtues and vices, and their exercises, fruits, and consequences, and events depending
on them; and are very particular; and most of them often repeated, with many precise
characteristics, descriptions, and limitations of qualities, conduct, influence, effects,
extent, duration, periods, circumstances, final issue, &c. which it would be tedious to
mention particularly. And to suppose, that all these are predicted by God, without any
certain knowledge of the future moral behaviour of free Agents, would be to the utmost
degree absurd.

5. Unless God foreknow the future acts of men’s Wills, and their behaviour as moral
Agents, all those great things which are foretold both in the Old Testament and the
New, concerning the erection, establishment, and universal extent of the kingdom of the
Messiah, were predicted and promised while God was in ignorance whether any of
these things would come to pass or no, and did but guess at them. For that kingdom is
not of this world, it does not consist in things external, but is within men, and consists in
the dominion of virtue in their hearts, in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy
ghost; and in these things made manifest in practice, to the praise and glory of God.
The Messiah came “to save men from their sins, and deliver them from their spiritual
enemies; that they might serve him in righteousness and holiness before Him: he gave
himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a
peculiar people, zealous of good works.” And therefore his success consists in gaining
men’s hearts to virtue, in their being made God’s willing people in the day of his power.
His conquest of his enemies consists in his victory over men’s corruptions and vices.
And such a victory, and such a dominion is often expressly foretold: that his kingdom
shall fill the earth; that all people, nations, and languages should serve and obey him;
and so that all nations should go up to the mountain of the house of the Lord, that he
might teach them his ways, and that they might walk in his paths; and that all men
should be drawn to Christ, and the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord (true virtue and religion) as the waters cover the seas; that God’s laws should be put into men’s inward parts, and written in their hearts; and that God’s people should be all righteous, &c. &c.

A very great part of the Old-Testament prophecies is taken up in such predictions as these.—And here I would observe, that the prophecies of the universal prevalence of the kingdom of the Messiah, and true religion of Jesus Christ, are delivered in the most peremptory manner, and confirmed by the oath of God, Isa. xlv. 22, to the end, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else. I have SWORN by my Self, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto Me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to Him shall men come,” &c. But, here, this peremptory declaration and great oath of the Most High, are delivered with such mighty solemnity, respecting things which God did not know, if he did not certainly foresee the Volitions of moral Agents.

And all the predictions of Christ and his apostles, to the like purpose, must be without knowledge: as those of our Saviour comparing the kingdom of God to a grain of mustard-seed, growing exceeding great, from a small beginning; and to leaven, hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened, &c.—And the prophecies in the epistles concerning the restoration of the Jewish nation to the true church of God, and bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles; and the prophecies in all the Revelation concerning the glorious change in the moral state of the world of mankind, attending the destruction of Antichrist, “the kingdoms of the world becoming the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ;” and its being granted to the church to be “arrayed in that fine linen, white and clean, which is the righteousness of saints,” &c.

Corol. 1. Hence that great promise and oath of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so much celebrated in Scripture, both in the Old Testament and the New, namely, “That in their seed all the nations and families of the earth should be blessed,” must be made on uncertainties, if God does not certainly foreknow the Volitions of moral Agents. For the fulfilment of this promise consists in that success of Christ in the work of redemption, and that setting up of his spiritual kingdom over the nations of the world, which has been spoken of. Men are “blessed in Christ:” no otherwise than as they are brought to acknowledge him, trust in him, love and serve him, as is represented and predicted in Psal lxxii. 11. “All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve him.” With ver. 17. “Men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed.” This oath to Jacob and Abraham is fulfilled in subduing men’s iniquities; as is implied in that of the prophet Micah, chap. vii. 19, 20.

Corol. 2. Hence also it appears, that the first gospel promise that ever was made to mankind, that great prediction of the salvation of the Messiah, and his victory over Satan, made to our first parents, (Gen. iii. 15.) if there be no certain Prescience of the volitions of moral Agents, must have no better foundation than conjecture. For Christ’s victory over Satan consists in men’s being saved from sin, and in the victory of virtue
and holiness over that vice and wickedness which Satan by his temptations has introduced, and wherein his kingdom consists.

6. If it be so, that God has not a Prescience of the future actions of moral Agents, it will follow, that the prophecies of Scripture in general are without Foreknowledge. For Scripture prophecies, almost all of them, if not universally, are either predictions of the actings and behaviour of moral Agents, or of events depending on them, or some way connected with them; judicial dispensations, judgments on men for their wickedness, or rewards of virtue and righteousness, remarkable manifestations of favour to the righteous, or manifestations of sovereign mercy to sinners, forgiving their iniquities, and magnifying the riches of divine grace; or dispensations of Providence, in some respect or other, relating to the conduct of the subjects of God’s moral government, wisely adapted thereto; either providing for what should be in a future state of things, through the Volitions and voluntary actions of moral Agents, or consequent upon them, and regulated and ordered according to them. So that all events that are foretold, are either moral events, or others which are connected with and accommodated to them.

That the predictions of Scripture in general must be without knowledge, if God does not foresee the Volitions of men, will further appear, if it be considered, that almost all events belonging to the future state of the world of mankind, the changes and revolutions which come to pass in empires, kingdoms, and nations, and all societies, depend, in ways innumerable, on the acts of men’s Wills; yea, on an innumerable multitude of millions of Volitions. Such is the state and course of things in the world of mankind, that one single event, which appears in itself exceeding inconsiderable, may, in the progress and series of things, occasion a succession of the greatest and most important and extensive events; causing the state of mankind to be vastly different from what it would otherwise have been, for all succeeding generations.

For instance, the coming into existence of those particular men, who have been the great conquerors of the world, which, under God, have had the main hand in all the consequent state of the world, in all after-ages; such as Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, Pompey, Julius Caesar, &c. undoubtedly depended on many millions of acts of the will, in their parents. And perhaps most of these Volitions depended on millions of Volitions in their contemporaries of the same generation; and most of these on millions of Volitions in preceding generations.— As we go back, still the number of Volitions, which were some way the occasion of the event, multiply as the branches of a river, until they come at last, as it “were, to an infinite number. This will not seem strange to any one who well considers the matter; if we recollect what philosophers tell us of the innumerable multitudes of those things which are the principia, or stamina vitae, concerned in generation; the animalcula in semine masculo, and the ova in the womb of the female; the impregnation or animating of one of these in distinction from all the rest, must depend on things infinitely minute relating to the time and circumstances of the act of the parents, the state of their bodies, &c. which must depend on innumerable foregoing circumstances and occurrences; which must depend, infinite ways, on foregoing acts of their wills; which are occasioned by innumerable things that happen in the course of their lives, in which their own and their neighbor’s behaviour
must have a hand, an infinite number of ways. And as the Volitions of others must be so many ways concerned in the conception and birth of such men; so, no less, in their preservation, and circumstances of life, their particular determinations and actions, on which the great revolutions they were the occasions of, depended. As, for instance, when the conspirators in Persia, against the Magi, were consulting about a succession to the empire, it came into the mind of one of them, to propose, that he whose horse neighed first, when they came together the next morning, should be king. Now, such a thing coming into his mind, might depend on innumerable incidents, wherein the Volitions of mankind had been concerned. But, in consequence of this accident, Darius, the son of Hystaspes, was king. And if this had not been, probably his successor would not have been the same, and all the circumstances of the Persian empire might have been far otherwise: Then perhaps Alexander might never have conquered that empire; and then probably the circumstances of the world in all succeeding ages, might have been vastly otherwise. I might further instance in many other occurrences; such as those on which depended Alexander’s preservation, in the many critical junctures of his life, wherein a small trifle would have turned the scale against him; and the preservation and success of the Roman people, in the infancy of their kingdom and commonwealth, and afterwards; upon which all the succeeding changes in their state, and the mighty revolutions that afterwards came to pass in the habitable world, depended. But these hints may be sufficient for every discerning considerate person, to convince him, that the whole state of the world of mankind, in all ages, and the very being of every person who has ever lived in it, in every age, since the times of the ancient prophets, has depended on more Volitions, or acts of the Wills of men, than there are sands on the sea-shore.

And therefore, unless God does most exactly and perfectly foresee the future acts of men’s Wills, all the predictions which he ever uttered concerning David, Hezekiah, Josiah, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander; concerning the four monarchies, and the revolutions in them; and concerning all the wars, commotions, victories, prosperity, and calamities, of any kingdoms, nations, or communities in the world, have all been without knowledge.

So that, according to this notion, God not foreseeing the Volitions and free actions of men, he could foresee nothing appertaining to the state of the world of mankind in future ages; not so much as the being of one person that should live in it: and could foreknow no events, but only such as he would bring to pass himself by the extraordinary interposition of his immediate power; or things which should come to pass in the natural material world, by the laws of motion, and course of nature, wherein that is independent on the actions or works of mankind: that is, as he might, like a very able mathematician and astronomer, with great exactness calculate the revolutions of the heavenly bodies, and the greater wheels of the machine of the external creation.

And if we closely consider the matter, there will appear reason to convince us, that he could not, with any absolute certainty, foresee even these. As to the first, namely, things done by the immediate and extraordinary interposition of God’s power, these cannot be foreseen, unless it can be foreseen when there shall be occasion for such extraordinary
interposition. And that cannot be foreseen, unless the state of the moral world can be foreseen. For whenever God thus interposes, it is with regard to the state of the moral world, requiring such divine interposition. Thus God could not certainly foresee the universal deluge, the calling of Abraham, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues on Egypt, and Israel’s redemption out of it, the expelling of the seven nations of Canaan, and the bringing Israel into that land; for these all are represented as connected with things belonging to the state of the moral world. Nor can God foreknow the most proper and convenient time of the day of judgment and general conflagration; for that chiefly depends on the course and state of things in the moral World.

Nor, Secondly, can we on this supposition reasonably think, that God can certainly foresee what things shall come to pass, in the course of things, in the natural and material world, even those which in an ordinary state of things might be calculated by a good astronomer. For the moral world is the end of the natural world; and the course of things in the former, is undoubtedly subordinate to God’s designs with respect to the latter. Therefore he, has seen cause, from regard to the state of things in the moral world, extraordinarily to interpose, to interrupt, and lay an arrest on the course of things in the natural world; and unless he can foresee the Volition of men, and so know something of the future state of the moral world, he cannot know but that he may still have as great occasion to interpose in this manner, as ever he had: nor can he foresee how, or when, he shall have occasion thus to interpose.

Corol. 1. It appears from the things observed, that unless God foresees the Volition of moral Agents, that cannot be true which is observed by the apostle James, (Acts xv. 18.) “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”

Corol. 2. It appears, that unless God foreknows the Volition of moral Agents, all the prophecies of Scripture have no better foundation than mere conjecture; and that, in most instances, a conjecture which must have the utmost uncertainty; depending on an innumerable multitude of Volitions, which are all, even to God, uncertain events: however, these prophecies are delivered as absolute predictions, and very many of them in the most positive manner, with asseverations; and some of them with the most solemn oaths.

Corol. 3. It also follows, that if this notion of God’s ignorance of future Volitions be true, in vain did Christ say, after uttering many great and important predictions, depending on men’s moral actions, (Matt. xxiv. 35.) “Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away.”

Corol. 4. From the same notion of God’s ignorance of future Volitions, it would follow, that in vain has he himself often spoken of the predictions of his word, as evidences of Foreknowledge; of that which is his prerogative as GOD, and his peculiar glory, greatly distinguishing him from all other beings; (as in Isa. xli. 22.— 26 xliii. 9, 10. xliv. 8. xlv. 21. xlvi. 10. and xlviii. 14.)
Arg. II. If God does not foreknow the Volitions of moral Agents, then he did not foreknow the fall of man, nor of angels, and so could not foreknow the great things which are consequent on these events; such as his sending his Son into the world to die for sinners, and all things pertaining to the great work of redemption; all the things which were done for four thousand years before Christ came, to prepare the way for it; and the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ; setting Him at the head of the universe as King of heaven and earth, angels and men; and setting up his church and kingdom in this world, and appointing him the Judge of the world; and all that Satan should do in the world in opposition to the kingdom of Christ: and the great transactions of the day of judgment, &c. And if God was thus ignorant, the following scriptures, and others like them, must be without any meaning, or contrary to truth. (Eph. i. 4.) “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” (1 Pet. i. 20.) “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world.” (2 Tim. i. 9.) “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling; not according to our works, but according to his own purpose, and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” So (Eph. iii. 11.) speaking of the wisdom of God in the work of redemption, “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus” (Tit. i. 2.) “In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” (Rom. viii. 29.) “Whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate,” &c. (1 Pet. i. 2.) “Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”

If God did not foreknow the fall of man, nor the redemption by Jesus Christ, nor the Volitions of man since the fall; then he did not foreknow the saints in any sense; neither as particular persons, nor as societies or nations; either by election, or by mere foresight of their virtue or good works; or any foresight of anything about them relating to their salvation; or any benefit they have by Christ, or any manner of concern of theirs with a Redeemer.

Arg. III. On the supposition of God's ignorance of the future Volitions of free Agents, it will follow, that God must in many cases truly repent what he has done, so as properly to wish he had done otherwise: by reason that the event of things in those affairs which are most important, viz. the affairs of his moral kingdom, being uncertain and contingent, often happens quite otherwise than he was before aware of. And there would be reason to understand that, in the most literal sense, (Gen. vi. 6.) “It repented the Lord, that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart,” (and 1 Sam. xv. 11.) contrary to Num. xxiii. 19. “God is not the son of Man, that he should repent;” and 1 Sam. xv. 29. “Also the Strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent; for he is not a man that he should repent.” Yea, from this notion it would follow, that God is liable to repent and be grieved at his heart, in a literal sense, continually; and is always exposed to an infinite number of real disappointments in governing the world; and to manifold, constant, great perplexity and vexation: but this is not very consistent with his title of “God over all, blessed for evermore;” which represents him as possessed of perfect, constant, and uninterrupted tranquility and felicity, as God over the universe, and in his management of the affairs of the world, as supreme and universal ruler. (See Rom. i. 25. ix. 5. 2 Cor. xi. 31. 1 Tim. vi. 15.)
ARG. IV. It will also follow from this notion, that as God is liable to be continually repenting of what he has done; so he must be exposed to be constantly changing his mind and intentions, as to his future conduct; altering his measures, relinquishing his old designs, and forming new schemes and projects. For his purposes, even as to the main parts of his scheme, such as belong to the state of his moral kingdom, must be always liable to be broken, through want of foresight; and he must be continually putting his system to rights, as it gets out of order, through the contingency of the actions of moral Agents: he must be a Being, who, instead of being absolutely immutable, must necessarily be the subject of infinitely the most numerous acts of repentance, and changes of intention, of any being whatsoever; for this plain reason, that his vastly extensive charge comprehends an infinitely greater number of those things which are to him contingent and uncertain. In such a situation, he must have little else to do, but to mend broken links as well as he can, and be rectifying his disjointed frame and disordered movements, in the best manner the case will allow, The Supreme Lord of all things must needs be under great and miserable disadvantages, in governing the world which he has made, and of which he has the care, through his being utterly unable to find out things of chief importance, which hereafter shall befall his system; for which, if he did but know, he might make seasonable provision. In many cases, there may be very great necessity that he should make provision, in the manner of his ordering and disposing things, for some great events which are to happen, of vast and extensive influence, and endless consequence to the universe; which he may see afterwards, when it is too late, and may wish in vain that he had known before, that he might have ordered his affairs accordingly. And it is in the power of man, on these principles, by his devices, purposes, and actions, thus to disappoint God, break his measures, make him continually change his mind, subject him to vexation, and bring him into confusion. But how do these things consist with reason, or with the word of God? Which represents, that all God’s works, all that he has ever to do, the whole scheme and series of his operations, are from the beginning perfectly in his view; and declares, that whatever devices and designs are in the hearts of men, “the counsel of the Lord shall stand, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations,” (Prov. xix. 21. Psal. xxxiii. 10, 11.) And “that which the Lord of hosts hath purposed, none shall disannul,” (Isa. xiv. 27.) And that he cannot be frustrated in one design or thought, (Job xlii. 2.) And “that which God doth, it shall be for ever, that nothing can be put to it, or taken from it,” (Eccl. iii. 14.) The stability and perpetuity of God’s counsels are expressly spoken of as connected with his foreknowledge, (Isa. xlvi. 10.) “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do my pleasure.” — And how are these things consistent with what the Scripture says of God’s immutability, which represents him as “without variableness, or shadow of turning;” and speaks of him, most particularly, as unchangeable with regard to his purposes, (Mal. iii. 6.) “I am the Lord; I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” (Exod. iii. 14.) “I AM THAT I AM. (Job xxiii. 13, 14.) “He is in one mind; and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth, even that he doth: for he performeth the thing that is appointed for me.”
If this notion of God's ignorance of future Volitions of moral Agents be thoroughly considered in its consequences, it will appear to follow from it, that God, after he had made the world, was liable to be wholly frustrated of his end in the creation of it; and so has been, in like manner, liable to be frustrated of his end in all the great works he had wrought. It is manifest, the moral world is the end of the natural: the rest of the creation is but a house which God hath built, with furniture, for moral Agents: and the good or bad state of the moral world depends on the improvement they make of their natural Agency, and so depends on their Volitions. And therefore, if these cannot be foreseen by God, because they are contingent, and subject to no kind of necessity, then the affairs of the moral world are liable to go wrong, to any assignable degree; yea, liable to be utterly ruined. As on this scheme, it may well be supposed to be literally said, when mankind, by the abuse of their mortal Agency, became very corrupt before the flood, "that the Lord repented that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart;" so, when he made the universe, he did not know but that he might be so disappointed in it, that it might grieve him at his heart that he had made it. It actually proved, that all mankind became sinful, and a very great part of the angels apostatized: and how could God know before, that all of them would not? And how could God know but that all mankind, notwithstanding means used to reclaim them, being still left to the freedom of their own Will, would continue in their apostasy, and grow worse and worse, as they of the old world before the flood did?

According to the scheme I am endeavouring to confute, the Fall of neither men nor angels could be foreseen, and God must be greatly disappointed in these events; and so the grand contrivance for our redemption, and destroying the works of the devil, by the Messiah, and all the great things God has done in the prosecution of these designs, must be only the fruits of his own disappointment; contrivances to mend, as well as he could, his system, which originally was all very good, and perfectly beautiful; but was broken and confounded by the free Will of angels and men. And still he must be liable to be totally disappointed a second time: he could not know, that he should have his desired success, in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of his only-begotten Son, and other great works accomplished to restore the state of things: he could not know, after all, whether there would actually be any tolerable measure of restoration; for this depended on the free Will of man. There has been a general great apostasy of almost all the Christian world, to that which was worse than heathenism; which continued for many ages. And how could God, without foreseeing men's Volitions, know whether ever Christendom would return from this apostasy? And which way would he foretell how soon it would begin? The apostle says, it began to work in his time; and how could it be known how far it would proceed in that age? Yea, how could it be known that the gospel which was not effectual for the reformation of the Jews, would ever be effectual for the turning of the heathen nations from their heathen apostasy, which they had been confirmed in for so many ages?

It is represented often in Scripture, that God, who made the world for himself, and created it for his pleasure, would infallibly obtain his end in the creation, and in all his works; that as all things are of him, so they would all be to him; and that in the final issue of things it would appear that he is "the first, and the last." (Rev. xxi. 6.) “And he
said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” But these things are not consistent with God’s liability to be disappointed in all his works, nor indeed with his failing of his end in any thing that he has undertaken.

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