

NOTES OF A

SERMON

BY

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AT

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NOTES OF A SERMON

Philippians 2: 12, 13. "*Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.*"

To understand any passage of scripture, we must know to whom it is addressed. This is obviously addressed, in common with the whole epistle, to believers;—"to all saints in Christ Jesus, which are in Philippi." The beginning of the 12th verse, in which our text commences, implies this. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always *obeyed*; not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence; work out," &c. The terms, therefore, may be readily understood.

He could not mean, by working out our own salvation, devising the plan;—that is the Father's work, and was done long ago. Not *redemption* or *justification*;—these were the Son's work, and were accomplished in that one offering, completed when he said 'it is *finished*,' and went to plead that finished sacrifice before the throne of God. Not regeneration;—that is the Spirit's work, and is evidently supposed to have been already wrought in those very persons;—they were saved-saints—so far, therefore, as regards regeneration, and sanctification, (in part at least,) salvation was already wrought in them.

What, then, is it? It seems to be the yielding of the mind to the motions of the spirit, when once it has been renewed—wrought in or upon, by the Lord. It includes all the duties of practical piety, in the widest sense. It is the power of God which quickens, which implants the life. It is the duty of men to use the means to develop the seminal principle implanted within them. And, as it is the office of the Husbandman to develop the seed he has sown, through the several stages of its growth, to maturity,—so, the christian is to work out his own salvation, by cultivating the principle of grace, and conducting it through all the different stages of growth and christian experience. A reason for thus working is stated; "for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure."

This interpretation is consistent with the scheme of salvation; since it harmonizes freedom and the power of choice in man, with the sovereignty and antecedent grace of God. The general truth here stated is, that men are acted on by a divine operation; but, at the same time, they act; and so plainly

is it exhibited, that these expressions alone would be sufficient to establish it. "work out your own salvation," is an act of man, and the duty of man. "It is God that worketh both to will" (*will precedes all moral action*) "and to do,"—shows that men are acted on by a divine operation, as precedent to their action and promotive of it.

1. *This idea grows, naturally and necessarily, out of our dependent condition, as creatures.* That all creatures are dependent, is obvious both from reason and scripture. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. If God cease to propel the vital current through our veins, to heave the breast, and give motion to the organs of life,—we sink, we perish, we fill the silent tomb. In regard, specially, to all that is spiritual, it is true, also, that "our sufficiency is of God;" "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, are from the Lord." How prays the church? "Draw me, we will run after thee." How declares the word of God? "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." How does the believer express his own action and determination? "I will run the way of thy commands, when thou shalt enlarge my heart." "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." He is our strength;—it is He that liveth in us; so that without Christ, we are without strength, But there is a prayer which seems comprehensive of the whole. Heb. 13:20, 21. "Now, the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work *to do his will; working in you* that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ."

So far as our dependence, as creatures, is concerned, the idea of man being operated on, in connection with their own action, seems obvious from reason, as well as from scripture: for, if it be closely examined, it will be discovered that entire independence is an attribute peculiar to God himself; and cannot be ascribed to others, without, in effect, making them equal to God.

2. *Both truths together, that men act and are acted upon, seem to be included in the general fact, that all holy exercises are both commanded as a duty, and promised as a gift.* *Faith* is the key of all the other graces—the commencement and token of all the rest. It is, accordingly, commanded, and put as if for the whole. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." "He that believeth not is condemned already; because he hath not believed on the only begotten Son of God." And "not of yourselves."

Repentance:—"Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." "God now commands all men everywhere to repent." But Christ is exalted "to *give* repentance and remission of sins."

Regeneration:—which includes so large a part of experimental religion;—In the Old Testament, God commands, "make you a new heart;" yet, he says, "a new heart will I give you." The same thing is expressed by *quickening*: that God quickens us, is written over the whole Bible; but we are commanded to "awake and arise from the dead." The *new Creation* is the subject of similarly blended commands and promises:—we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works,"—and also exhorted to "put on the new man."

Turning to God:—"Turn us again, O Lord of Hosts!" Yet the command comes, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord." "Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die?"

Love:—If there is anything that would seem to be purely a matter of Christian duty, it is love. "Love the Lord, all ye his Saints"—"Take good heed *unto yourselves* that ye love the Lord your God." Josh. 23:11. Yet, this same love is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." Rom. 5:5.

Coming to Christ:—"Come, for all things are now ready," says the Savior; stretching his bounteous hands, and inviting the hungry, and weary, and ruined. Yet, this same compassionate Savior says, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

Perseverance in holiness:—That this is a christian duty not be argued. But it is God that both *begins and performs* the good work in his people. Phil. 1:6. That this passage relates to perseverance in holiness is obvious from the whole connexion.

3. *Commands and petitions are mingled all through the scriptures; and, taken together, prove that men both act, and are acted upon, by a divine operation.* Commands prove that men act;—for, when God says *do any thing*, it implies that men are not stocks, not stones, but moral agents—capable of moral suasion, of understanding and acting, upon motives freely. Prayers, on the other hand, suppose that God acts on us,—that he both can, and will, work in us; both to will and to do. There is no man that prays, but believes that God can hear, and answer, and bless him; and that without that

blessing, he is lost, darkened, blinded, sinful,—and will remain so forever. This implies that God does influence the mind by a divine operation. If we pray for the conversion of sinners, do we mean what we say? If we do, we expect God to attend the just means of grace with his blessing. In fine, the fact that we do any thing in obedience and ask God's blessing in it, unites both these truths in harmony—that men freely act, and yet are acted on by a divine operation.

Let us not, then, give up either the doctrine of human activity and responsibility, or that of the divine sovereignty and efficiency. Why should they be thought inconsistent? Or why should those who cling to one be disposed to doubt, or disbelieve, or explain away, the other? If you cannot see the consistency of both, that does not prove them inconsistent. Two things may be entirely consistent with each other, of which yet you cannot see the consistency. Two things may be certainly proved true, by separate lines of evidence; but, if you attempt to reverse them, and to prove one by the kind of evidence which demonstrates the other, you will probably fail.—Yet, they are true; and may be consistent. For example, take the simplest flower that blooms in your path-way. *Reason* teaches us that it is the product of the power of God. Our *senses* inform us that it has a certain color and odor. Now, because you cannot prove by the senses that it is God's work; shall we deny that it is? or will a man shut up his eyes and close the avenues of the senses, and demand evidence, from reason alone, that it has color, or odor, or form?

We see, then, that two things relating to the same subject may be proved by separate sources of evidence,—may be both true, and both consistent; and yet, if you attempt to discover, or prove, the one fact through the same line of argument as has established the other, you must fail.

To apply this illustration:—Our dependence on God is made known to us by reason; and, also, by revelation, through the reason. By reason; because men never act without motive or will,—and this, revelation tells us, God influences. But consciousness teaches us that our acts are our own, and that we act freely in all that we do. These are not opposite or contradictory ideas; but different truths about the same subject,—proven by different sources of evidence. And though our faculties are so limited that we cannot *demonstrate* the consistency, or detect the precise point of junction, between the two; reason teaches us that we act dependent—consciousness that we act free;—

and experience teaches that one does not hinder nor contradict the other.

I would appeal to consciousness, and to experience, in this matter; which I regard as legitimate sources of evidence. Is there any man so beastly as not to be satisfied (if he ever thinks on the subject at all) that a number of his actions are brought about, more or less directly, by the divine procurement? Is there any man who does not recognize the fact that there is a Providence in this world, shaping our ends, leading us by the hand, and directing our paths? Now, did you ever feel the divine hand constraining yours, or forcing you against your will? When you rose, this morning, and saddled your beast, and turned his head to this place of worship, were you conscious of any thing controlling your will? yet, it is not to be doubted that God brought you here; and he may have brought some of you here to bestow a great blessing upon you. And so, in all the affairs of life; while we are obliged to admit the hand of God moving in and on the world, and thankfully recognize many of the events of our own history as brought about by divine procurement; there has been no consciousness of divine power forcing or compelling us.

When Adam was made and fashioned, and received life from receiving the breath breathed into him by the Creator, he was not conscious of any force or violence being done to him. He rose, and walked forth through the beautiful earth, beautiful because sinless, in which God had placed him; as free in his motions, and in his will to move, as any thing can possibly be conceived;—if the question occurred to him, "how did I come?" in gratefully referring it to God, was there any trace of consciousness of an undue power, exerted over him, constraining his freedom? It argues a beast, and not a man, to deny that we act, and are free in acting; it argues great inattention to suppose that we are not acted upon and dependent.

But, since some regard it as an insuperable obstacle to their reception of both these great truths, that they come, after a little investigation into their connection, to a point where they are compelled to stop, and which they cannot entirely explain, let us dwell further here; and inquire whether this difficulty is not one arising out of the limited nature of our present faculties; inseparable from all truth whatever, and not peculiar to this subject. There are a great many things which exist—yet you cannot tell me the manner of their existence. The fact itself may be plain—perfectly intelligible, but its relation to other facts equally manifest, may be hid in obscurity. And when we

undertake to trace back any fact to its connections, we shall soon come to a point where we can go no further. If a nation of blind men, who had never known, either by experience or hearsay, any thing of sight, were told that by means of a little organ not an inch in diameter, inserted in the head, we could be enabled to detect objects at the distance of miles, and become acquainted with some of their characters, as exactly as if under our hands;—would this be believed? But *you* see—you have eyes:—you know, you are certain, that you see. Now *how do you see?* I ask this, not as a philosophical speculation; but as a question which may show you the bounds of our limited capacities. You may tell me about the humors and the lenses—and the retina, and the reflection of images, and all that—but when you have gone all through;—*what sees?*—how does it see?—can you tell me?—can any mortal? It is beyond the reach of man to tell me. *Yet you do see.*

I can ask you questions in three minutes about a flower or a leaf—that all the philosophers of the world cannot answer. The plant grows;—we see and know that:—How it grows, why it grows—we know not. In every subject of investigation there is a point, and that point *not far off*, beyond which human intelligence cannot go. Now shall we deny facts, because we cannot explain the mode of their existence; or throw away as inconsistent and absurd, truths which are surely proved to us by independent, but legitimate and conclusive, classes of evidence?

The Scriptures do not undertake to explain mysteries. They leave them unexplained. There is a difference between difficulties, and mysteries:—difficulties may be removed;—mysteries cannot, without a new revelation, or the bestowment of a higher intellect. If we can divest either texts or doctrines of difficulties, that is well;—that is the minister's business. But if any man undertakes to explain a mystery, he simply undertakes an impossibility.

A young man once said to Dr. Parr, conversing on the subject of the Trinity, 'I will not believe any thing I cannot understand,' 'Then, young man,' said he, "your creed will be the shortest I know of."

A question occurs, however, in relation to the subject of human activity and dependence, which it may not be amiss to consider briefly. Why is it that men are so much disposed to reject one of these doctrines, if they believe the other?

1. One reason may be, that consciousness is a source of information more

unremittingly present and active than reason. Man is every moment acted on by it, and its impressions are most deep and lasting. When we feel that we *act*, we set down; and then infer that, because we are free, we are not dependent. We are conscious of activity, we can not be conscious of dependence; because that lies without the sphere of consciousness. Now will any man say that God cannot act on a creature that he has made free, without violating his freedom? Or that he cannot make such a class of beings as may be influenced by him without feeling his hand on them, constraining them? And who will prove that men are not just such a class of beings? Unless these can be proven, it cannot be proven that free agency is inconsistent with a Divine operation.

2. Another cause may be found in the tendency to suppose that the mind is like matter. Hence, we are prone to think that the mind cannot be acted on without something analogous to physical force; and that it is incapable of acting while acted upon. But matter and mind are entirely different; different in their properties, and different in the ways by which we arrive at the knowledge of their properties. We might as well reason from any one thing to another most dissimilar, as to transfer our ideas of the incompatibility of activity with being acted on from matter to mind.

If we could suppose a clock that should run of itself, correct its own errors, wind up itself, and keep itself wound up forever; that (though a supposition of a physical impossibility,) would not compare with the mind,—with the living spiritual soul of man. But if such a machine could be supposed it would, in the fact that though acted on, it acts for itself and continues to act, approach, in some degree, towards the mind; yet, even that would fall infinitely—yes, infinitely short of that vast thing, the mind of man; not comprehended by any but its maker, not second to aught in the universe but Him. And, since there is this measureless gulf that admits of no passage, who shall pretend to argue, from the motions and dependence of matter, that the mind cannot act, while it is acted upon? Or, for another illustration, let us take any object that it undergoing changes such as the art of man can effect; e.g. marble under the hand of the sculptor. Let us suppose that this could be endowed with intelligence to understand the design of the artist, with reason and choice to approve of it, and then with activity and will to soften itself in the proper places, to give way or expand as desired for the accomplishment of the result:—could such a supposition be realized; it might afford some

slight comparison by which illustrate the activity of man, under a divine operation.

3. The greatest reason, however, why the Christian family is divided on one or the other side—rejecting one or the other of these great doctrines—is that the doctrine of dependence on the Divine being, throws us constantly into the hands, and on the mercy of God. Proud man does not like it;—prefers to look at the other side of the subject; becomes blinded, in part, by gazing at one view of the truth, alone; and forgets the Maker, in whom he lives, and moves and has his being.

All who have attended to theological discussions and questions, (and I feel myself now surrounded by such.) are aware that the great turning point as respects the divine sovereignty is, to account for the first commencement of the work of grace in the heart. Let us try to look into this. How comes the first movement toward God? This is the great question—the *one* question on this subject—the question on which all the others turn.

The Scriptures, in no ambiguous manner, intimate the true reply to this question. We are confident that "*he that hath begun* a good work in you will perform it &c." "Draw me; we will run after thee." I will not multiply quotations; the current of scripture ascribes the incipient operation of God. "I have loved thee, with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit." "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." "Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

But how was it in your experience? Let us go back, in our consciousness, with this question: for, if there is a work of grace in us, that work is a subject of consciousness, to some extent. Now I ask any Christian man to say—Did you go, irrespective of motive; go *first* to meet him and then he came to meet you? Did you, without a change of heart, resolve to change your own heart? And did this effort, self determined, self-sustained, self-dependent, succeed?

If so, the credit of the whole operation, the merit of the work, belongs to you. The Christian heart replies;—no, Jesus sought me first. I remember a pious old Methodist Lady, singing with my Mother, that hymn—"Come thou fount of every blessing;" and when she reached the verse "Jesus sought me when a

stranger, wandering from the fold of God"—she burst into tears, and hid her face in her handkerchief, and said,—Yes, it was so, it was so."

There spoke the true Christian heart. Take a true believer away from theological creeds and technicalities, from the musty volumes of controversy and the arena of bitter strife, and there is but one voice on the subject;—"Not unto us, not unto us, but unto God *be all* the glory."

How began that work, and who began it? Oh! if I had a tongue that could alarm the dead in their narrow house,—and, for an audience the assembled universe; I would rejoice to shout the acclamations of Glory to their rightful object. It is all due to God who loved me first, and gave himself for me;—who, when I was guiltily disinclined to it, brought my unwilling heart to seek him. Then, and thus, it began; hence, it is of grace, not of works.

I do not apprehend that there is a Christian in the whole world, who, if we were to go no farther, would disagree with this view. But there is a further question which it becomes us to consider.

If God began this work, when did he conceive the purpose to do this? He does nothing without a purpose to do it;—for purposeless acts, unintentioned, undeterminate acts do not belong even to rational creatures. So that, whatever he does, he intended to do. The Divine administration is but the divine purpose carried out. Now when did he begin to intend to commence this work in the heart of the sinner? To speak of *beginning to intend a thing*, with reference to God, is language not strictly correct;—but the poverty of language compels this perversion of terms.

Now, known unto God are all his *own* works from the foundation of the world. Whatever else he is ignorant of, he cannot fail to know what he himself will determine to do; and to know that he will determine to do a thing is to determine that he will do it—All possible knowledge is to God, forever, just whatever any single branch of any one idea is to us, at the moment we entertain it.—If there is ever one thought, full, distinct, vivid, thoroughly comprehended by yourself; then, just what that is to you, all knowledge is to God.

Now, if God knows all things, he knows who will be saved. But, could God know who will be saved, if it were not capable of being seen, as certain. But if, in order to be saved, a divine operation is necessary, and the incipient part of that operation belongs to God, could he foreknow that the man would

believe, unless he had a gracious purpose to work this operation in him, so that he might believe? I have sometimes conversed with my Arminian brethren, in a private and friendly way; (for I never had a *dispute* in my life and hope I never shall;) and, when they are brought to this point, they always, in effect deny the foreknowledge of God; that is, they say he can know all things, but he *chooses* not to know some things; and this is of the number. Now, there seems to me a manifest inconsistency here. How could he choose not to know some things, unless he first knew them, and then willed them out of his knowledge?—Is this Omniscience? Or again;—is it, in the nature of things, possible, *to* know a thing and then to will it out of knowledge? Suppose that you were to will that you would never know anything about hearing me speak to-day, and set yourselves with persevering and determined effort to will it out of your remembrance;—Could you do it? And how can it be conceivable that the Creator should voluntarily contract his knowledge to be less than the bounds of things knowable; or that his knowledge should be imperfect, whether made so by his own will, or by circumstances without him? But, if it be admitted that all things *even may be* known by the Creator, this is sufficient to prove that things which may thus be known are definite and certain; else how could they be known? View the subject in whatever light you will, sound reasoning will bring you round to the same conclusion.

My brethren, however mysterious and incomprehensible it may be, that God chose a poor sinner like me—freely chose me, loved me, redeemed me, called me, justified me, and will glorify me—I will rejoice in the truth, and thank him for his free grace! O, where is boasting, then? Not at the feet of Jesus; not at the cross. It belongs not to that position.

I will now endeavor to gather up some fragments of thought suggested by this great subject, and press them on your attention.

1. *It grows out of this doctrine that men's actions are their own.*—If faith is wrought in the heart by a divine operation, it does not hinder its being *we*, truly, that believe. If repentance is given by Christ, it is still really *we* that repent. God may work in us to will and to do; but *we* will, *we* do. Faith is produced by His spirit in our hearts, but *we* believe. He may produce the actions but the actions are ours. This cannot be altered or disguised.

Whether men act well or ill, their actions are their own. We are justify under the divine influences, in full possession of all that is necessary to moral

agency. His divine operation does not take away the power of understanding, or the faculty of conscience, or the capacity to will, freely, in view of motives. These three things are the essentials to moral agency; understanding, to comprehend the nature of the action; conscience, to appreciate its moral quality; and will to apprehend motives and choose freely, whether we shall do it or not. But none of these being taken away, or hindered in their operation by God's operation, the agent is fully a moral agent, and the acts are truly his own.

Unless it is admitted that Divine efficiency is consistent with human freedom and activity, it is obvious that there can be no holiness in the good actions of men, and no sinfulness in their evil actions; but the whole ground-work and foundation of morality will be overturned.

2. *Necessity in human action is not the same as compulsion.* If God works in us to will and to do, there is a *necessity* that we should will and do; but we are not *compelled* either to will or do. The act is obliged to be; but the man, in acting, is free. He is justify to act freely, and as a matter of choice. In regard to salvation, so far from compelling a man, against his will, the very thing which God does it to make him willing to act right; of his own choice, and under sufficient motive. The christian is willing, and chooses to do right; because a divine operation has made him so. He feels free; he is conscious that he is as heartily free in now trying to serve God, as when he went after the vanities and follies of his unconverted state. He now chooses the one, as he once chose the other; and if he is obliged to refer the change of mind and heart, which produced this choice; to God, this does not mar his perfect consciousness that he is now free in choosing Christ.

Let us look at this matter fairly. What is moral freedom of will? We can give no better definition, than that a man is always at liberty to do that which he thinks, on the whole, to be best. That a man should be just as capable of doing, and as free to do, what he thinks *not best*, is no notion of freedom at all. It is an absurdity. It is necessary that he should be inclined, by his constitution, to do that which, (all things taken together,) seems to him, at the moment of choice, best: and, if not,—he would not be a free moral agent. He may differ from all others in his estimates of what is best, and even from his own estimates at other times;—but to be influenced by the highest motive in the mind, at the moment,—this is the precise nature of moral freedom.

Now, can it be said that the Creator cannot place motive before the mind,—cannot meet a man in the high road of sin, and present truths and motives and influences, that will cause him to turn round and go the other way? He does this every time a sinner turns from the error of his way; influencing him by the power of motive, urged on the mind by the power of God. The man then acts, under this influence, as freely as water runs down hill; acts out the impulses of his renewed nature.

That a necessity of the act does not involve compulsion of the agent—may be more clearly illustrated, perhaps, by some spiritual facts. Saul's visit to Samuel may serve as an example. The Prophet had been informed by the Lord, on the day before (1 Sam. 9:1), that there should come a young man to him on the morrow, whom he must anoint king of Israel. There was, then, you see, a *necessity* that Saul should come;—for it was he who must sit on the throne of Israel: but how did he come? Was he taken up bodily by the hair of his head, or carried by a strong wind; or *compelled*, by any force done to his will or choice? No:—but he was induced by a succession of the most natural circumstances possible. It turned out, that the work animals of his father had strayed away; and he, with an old faithful servant, went every where seeking them. At last, after considerable wandering, they found themselves near the residence of Samuel. A sudden idea occurs to the mind of the thoughtful old servant;—"There lives a man, on that hill yonder, that tells strange things:—let us go to him; perhaps we can there learn something of the stray animals." He acts on this natural suggestion, and goes. Here was a necessity of the action; yet, as perfect freedom, in the motives which led to it, as if no prophecy had been made in reference to the matter. He might have said, "I won't;" so far as his liberty of willing and choosing was concerned: so far as we can see, he might altogether have refused to go, if he had been so inclined; yet, his going must come to pass. Here is an instance of *necessity*, but no *compulsion*.

Let us take another instance;—Paul's shipwreck. On that stormy night, on the Adriatic, while they were driven a long time, without sun or star, the angel stood by Paul and said—"Fear not, Paul; thou must stand before Caesar. I have given thee the lives of them that sail with thee." Now, it was divinely predicted that they should save their lives:—it was certain to happen, by a necessity which neither wind nor sea, storm nor wave, man nor devil, could prevent. Now, did Paul, as some who run into the extremes of Fatalism, lie

down and go to sleep, careless of the danger, and indolent as to action? Did he say, If we are to be saved, we will be saved, any how; do what we may? No;—he was awake, on the deck; and his keen eye, glancing all around amid the gloom, detected the sailors about to cut loose the boats and escape silently, leaving that herd of landsmen to perish. He arouses the captain, informs him of the danger, and of the plot he has discovered; and says,—"Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Was Paul doubtful about the Heavenly promise? Did his faith waver? Or was he, in any respect, compelled? This was perfectly consistent with the certainty of the action. It was certain that the men should be saved; because it had been divinely foreseen and predicted. Yet the certainty depended, so to speak, on the contingency of the use of the means; and all the parties acted freely in using these means. The sailors acted freely in trying to escape; Paul acted freely in watching them, and finding out their schemes; the captain acted freely in cutting away the boats, and thus disappointing their treacherous attempt. It is plain that their volitions were as free as if the Creator had never predicted the result. Now, in regard to all the results, brought about under the divine administration, if we admit that they are foreseen, certain, and determinate, does it follow that these very same things can not be justify dependent on the contingency of human actions; or that it is not within the compass of the divine wisdom to bring them about through human agents, and yet leave them free in their actions?

3. *Sinners are free in working out their own destruction*, not withstanding the divine work on them: just as the saints are free in working out their own salvation, while God works in them to will and to do, of his good pleasure.

It is certain that Pharaoh, in some sense, acted under the divine operation; for we are told that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. We are also told that he hardened his own heart. This presents the consistency of the two in a very just and striking manner. He was free in resisting all those considerations addressed to him by Moses, from God;—the divine wonders and messages were calculated, obviously, not to harden his heart, but to soften it, and make him give up his determination. He acted freely, acted on the ordinary motives of a sordid and ambitious prince, determined to avail himself of the bone and sinew of the people under his yoke, without regard either to justice, or to humanity, or to a sound policy. And, in all this, he was free in working out his own destruction.

There is a connection of passages remarkably forcible, as it appears to me, on this subject; in which the same passage, first used to express judicial hardening, (Isai. 6:9, 10), is applied by Christ to voluntary hardening of a man's self, (Mat. 13: 14, 15); then by John (12:39, 40), to judicial; then by Paul (Acts 28; 25-27), to voluntary. Does the prophet differ from the Savior? Do Paul and John disagree, when they all use the same passage to express, in turn, the judicial hardening under a divine operation, as a judgment for an offence, and the voluntary hardening of a man's own heart by wicked works? Not at all: They all proclaim the same truth; that sinners harden their own hearts, and work out their own destruction freely; and that it is consistent with the Divine administration to let them do so.

All God's arrangements of grace and invitations are directed, not with a view to damn, but to save; but men *may* work out their own damnation; and the responsibility is theirs. This, my brethren, is an awful subject. I desire that I may be enabled to present the truth of God in such a light to your minds, as to carry conviction to your consciences: but I am not sure that whenever I preach, with whatever of earnestness or clearness or force of argument I may have at command, I may not be heaping up fuel to make the flames of hell hotter to some of you, in perdition! Oh! what a result to take place, when listening to the word of God? Taking place now perhaps, with some of you who are doing nothing more with the gracious instruments of good, than to turn them to self-destruction:—as though a madman, drowning, should strangle himself with the rope thrown out to his assistance, and with his own hands complete his own destruction!

4. *God converts sinners in a way consistent with their moral freedom.* That it is God's work to convert a soul, let all Heaven and Earth, and every Saint, arise and proclaim. But, are not men free, in this also? The sinner is not passive, only, in conversion; but active; and as free in every part of the process as it is possible for any one to be,—though there is a divine operation leading to the result, and bringing it about. When we call on the sinner to repent, we feel that we are exhorting him to a duty; yet, if we have any sense or gospel in us, we do not mean that he either will, or can, do it without divine aid. The sinner knows that he is responsible. If he does not repent, he knows that it is his own fault. Our conscience, when we come to consider, convinces us of unbelief, not as a calamity, a misfortune; but a sin. How little excusable are you, when you do not come to Christ? You may do right—You

may love God—choose life—walk the narrow way:—you are required to do this; and are guilty and condemned for not doing it. The divine aid is, indeed, necessary to your doing it; but that aid is freely offered you. You do not desire it. No man can think that he is not authorized to preach both of these doctrines, if he will only open the bible, and open his eyes to its words; and then open his heart to the consistency of these heavenly truths. The sinner's inability consists not in his dependence on God which is no hindrance; but in his guilty disinclination to him. Is this an excuse for the omission of any duty, or the commission of any evil? Especially, when God has taken the pains to present motives as powerful as Heaven, as deep as Hell, which ought to influence our conduct? This deep-seated indisposition to love and obey God is, in fact, an aggravation of the fault,—the very essence of the fault and sinfulness of our fallen nature; and cannot cloak or excuse the least sin, internal or external.

5. God is perfectly sincere in his counsels and invitations: notwithstanding his divine foreknowledge of the consequences. That a God of Omniscience foresees that one person will repent, and that another will not, must be admitted by all. Yet, He offers mercy to all. Now, is God sincere, calling on men to repent, when he knows they will not? O Yes! He is sincere, and earnest; and hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. Now, can these things be consistent? Facts may show. The captivity and bondage of the Israelites in Egypt were fixed, to a day: (Gen. 15:13, Ex. 12:41). Yet Pharaoh was exhorted to release them earlier; and that by divine direction. He ought to have obeyed; and, in that case, it would have been better for him. Moses and Aaron were told that he would not let the people go, at the time they were sent with a message from God to demand it. Ezekiel was told that the people would not hear him, yet commanded to go and exhort them. Ezek. 3:4-7. The crucifixion of our Lord, we are told, was by "the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God," Acts 3:23; yet the hands that slew him were "wicked hands." They were guilty for doing it. The Salvation of the world, your Salvation and mine, and that of all the people of God, was suspended on the fact that the Son of God should die. This fact was foreseen—predetermined: Yet, will any man say that the parties concerned were not both free, and guilty, in their course;—acting as they did, from evil motives, and the promptings of their own bad hearts? Can any Christian man tell us that *they* were faultless, who bore false witness against him, who drove the nails

and plaited the crown of thorns, and stove them into his bleeding head; who condemned the spotless Son of God, and said "his blood be upon us?" Oh! if I should meet the man that spat upon him, the man that thrust his spear into his side, or that derided and mocked him while hanging on the Cross;—I would preach the Gospel to him, through that despised Redeemer; but I would tell him that he was a sinner, a sinner in that very act,—though it might have been predicted, and made certain by "the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God" that the act would be done—"that the scriptures might be fulfilled."

These thoughts do not involve God in the determinative procurement of evil actions. That wicked actions are fore-seen, none can deny. They will happen;—as, for example, the crucifixion of Christ: but, that God is the Author of them, or predestines them, so as to excuse the actors, or to involve him in the guilt of them, none can affirm. That they are done by divine permission, we are obliged to admit; but this does not hinder his laws and punishments against them. That the actors are free and guilty in doing them is evident, not only from those laws and penalties,—but because the man who does them is sensible that he is free at every step of his progress, and could do otherwise, if he were so disposed. This is sufficient to show his responsibility, and vindicate God; even if it were not certainly determined whether the doing of such and such actions could be dispensed with, in the government of God, or not.^[1] The actions, *simply as events*, may be certain and indispensable; Yet the individual doers may not be forced. In this connection John 19:11 deserves to be considered. Our Lord said to Pilate, "thou couldst have no power, at all, against me, except it were given thee from above; *therefore*, he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." God gave the power—exalted Pilate to the station which he occupied, and by virtue of which he was empowered to pass sentence upon Christ. Yet, was he therefore innocent? or did that excuse him that delivered Jesus unto him? He, too, was the subject of distinct prophecy, as stated by Peter, Acts 1:15-17; but was he therefore guiltless? On the contrary, it made his sin "the greater" that God's hand was also in the matter; because he did not heed it, and because the conviction of his own dependence, and of God's presence and power did not restrain him from disobedience to his command.

Now, if men have not the grace which changes their hearts, and turns them from their sinful dispositions, have they a right to complain? I answer,

(1) They have no right to that grace; they have no claim on God for it; they are guilty, and condemned, and *deserve* nothing but woe at his hands.

(2) God has promised it to them, if they wish it and seek for it. He promises, with the utmost clearness, to give his spirit to them that ask it. Can they complain, then, if they have not that which they have not thought fit to ask, honestly and earnestly,—which they do not wish? There is no holiness in an act which is not free; and, if God were to compel you, against your will, not by moral suasion or means consentaneous to the nature of the mind,—if grace is to bring a man to the truth, without *motive*, without *his will*; then it would be without holiness: and, we learn that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

If any desire to go still further into the inquiry, and ask, why some have their indisposition to holiness overcome and altered, and others have not;—I answer, that this is a matter which we are not called on to decide, which we have not the means of deciding,—which is among the "secret things" that "belong unto the Lord our God." Deut 29:29. But, there may be, for anything that I can see, a degree of perseverance and obstinacy in rejecting him which Christ does not see fit to overcome;—there may be a line beyond which he does not go after the sinner; though, even there, the offers of mercy are made. We cannot trace that line;—We have no faculties to ascertain its position;—but there *may be* such a line. And, O my dying fellow-men, it *may be* that some of you are near that line, now. Perhaps you have one foot on it, as it were; and the other foot lifted to step over it. It may be, that this very offer of mercy is the last available one that shall come to you;—that, if grace is rejected now, the spirit will take his everlasting flight, and God say—"he is joined to his idols—let him alone."

If any should still doubt, how Jesus can be sincere in calling those to repentance, who, he knows, will not repent;—let me ask, are there not cases, at least, faintly analogous, in this world's matter? Suppose the instance of virtuous, intelligent, and affectionate wife, who is so unfortunate as to have a drunken and depraved husband. She exerts all her arts to make home pleasant, that he may be kept away from his evil company, and from vice; and if she has succeeded for a month, with what delight and pride does she regard him, and with what anxious hope that he may not fall again. But a day for some public gathering arrives; and she sees him preparing his clothes, his

horse and all, to go. She knows that if he goes, he will get drunk. "Now, husband, don't go; think of me, think of your children, think of the happiness of our first life and love; don't go." She may be well convinced, *may know*, that he *will* go, in spite of all her entreaties;—go, and get drunk, and come back, like a beast. But, will any brute rise up, while her heart is bleeding with the grief she can neither repress nor conceal, and break that affectionate heart, by telling her she is not sincere in all this—that she is playing the hypocrite?

I think that I *know* what some of *you* are going to do. You will pass out of this house, and exchange civilities with your neighbors, and make some observation, perhaps about the preacher; and remain utterly careless, as you were before. Humanly speaking I am certain that some of my unconverted hearers are not going to heed this message—not going to take one step to flee from "the wrath to come." Yet, I may call God to witness that I am sincere, and in earnest, in warning you. *My heart's desire and prayer to God for you is that you may be saved.*

The following thoughts were connected with those which close the discourse, in the mind of the preacher; and were intended for delivery: but want of time excluded them. They are inserted here on the preacher's own responsibility.

We may be ignorant of the way in which God foreknows acts as certain, but leaves them depending contingently on the will of the actor; yet, both may be true. Should it surprise us that God does things in a way we cannot understand? We do things ourselves which we cannot explain,—vision, intellection, sensation; only those who have such faculties can understand them. It is not unsafe to be ignorant of the manner, while we know the facts; nor is it disreputable to profess our ignorance in such respects. If a prince could foresee whatever might be done in his dominions, this would be a great perfection. Should this disqualify, or depose him; and hinder him from governing his people by laws? Apply this to God;—his foreknowledge exists in him, as divine *perfection*; would it, then be a good inference to say, "He foreknows all things,—*therefore* he is unfit to govern the world—to punish rebels?" God's foreknowing that a man will do thus, or so, is no sanction for his doing it; does not alter the nature of good and evil, or the temper of the person doing either. The *present* knowledge of what is now going on can have no such effect; neither can *foreknowledge*.

It may be fit that God should forewarn men of their sins, though he knows they will not forsake them. Mark 14:30, 72. These means, if fruitless to *their reformation*, may not be fruitless as to all other purposes; the vindication of *his eternal justice and mercy*. Surely, it is most fit and reasonable, the Divine Ruler should do every thing to declare, before hand, his hatred of sin and his love of holiness; whatever might be the effect of such declarations. Because he foresees that men will be wicked, and do what is unworthy of them; should he therefore omit to do what is worthy of Him? Should we condemn him in doing what is right, as he will; because we are voluntarily and inexcusably wicked? "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

FOOTNOTE:

[1] The following views are so pertinent to the subject here discussed (that although they have been published before, and were not delivered in this Discourse, the writer thinks it not inappropriate to insert them here, in the form of a note.

"We are not bound to decide, for any practical purpose, whether a different course of conduct, under the circumstances, would have been more agreeable to him; it is sufficient that God commands all men to repent, places before them the inducements and means of repentance, and leaves them without excuse. For satisfaction sake, however, we may say that a different course of conduct in the wicked will always be more agreeable to God: his declarations on this subject are sincere; his willingness to save, and his reluctance to punish, are real, notwithstanding he does not bestow, on all, that grace which practically brings them to salvation. The unwillingness, it is true, is somewhere;—either the sinner is unwilling to be a christian, or God is unwilling that he should be. The Almighty declares, with a solemn oath, it is not in Him. Ezekiel 33:11, Rev. 22:17. Shall he have no claim to sincerity nor kindness until he exert also some direct and arbitrary force on the sinner's will? A parent may know that the peculiar advantages he provides for his child will not make him learned: yet he may have the best reasons for not increasing them; as well as for not taking them away, till trial be fully made. It is sufficient for parental duty that the child is so placed that he may do well; it is not required that the parent make his situation such that he shall. If the force of this argument be opposed by the suggestion, that earthly parents are limited in power, have not all means at their command—especially the means of influencing the heart and feelings; while our Heavenly Parent has: it is answered, that God's power and resources do not extend to contradictions and inconsistencies. If his power is not sufficient to do any thing inconsistent with wisdom and goodness, this does not diminish his claim to our adoration or reverence, but enhances it. We know too little of his great scheme, of the dependence of one part on another, and of the great reasons which support the whole, to judge of what he can do—of what would, and what would not, be inconsistent with that scheme. If we determine not to wait for the explanation, in another state of being, of what is inscrutable in this point, there are many things like it, of which we must equally demand the immediate solution. For example, why does not God reduce the enormous

amount of pain and suffering endured by mortals? Why does he not wholly prevent all crimes among men? The reasons, could they be given in human language, are too unwieldy and vast for our minds. Certainly, his not acting in these cases is not from the want of physical power, of wisdom, or of goodness. If we presume that the restrictions under which he acts, here, are wise and good; why not, as to the other? He that can answer one of these questions, can answer the whole."—*Circular of the Tuscaloosa Association*, 1844.