

# PREDESTINATION

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*"And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve, saying, Fear not Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar; and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved." — Acts 27:22, 23, 24, 30, 31.*

It was Mr. Pitt, I believe, who, after reading Butler's Analogy, remarked that "it suggested more doubts than it answered." In removing one difficulty, we ought to be careful lest we create others which are greater. However, in speaking of the deep things of God, all we can do is to show how far the human understanding can go, when it ceases to obey reason, and debases itself to mere scholastic logic.

*You are all familiar with the narrative of Paul's shipwreck. In spite of some plausible objections, it is certain almost to demonstration that the vessel was lost upon the island now known as Malta.* The whole description is very graphic; the impending danger; the commanding attitude of the Apostle during that fearful night; his inspiring address as the dim morning light reveals the terrified, haggard company—two hundred and seventy-six in all—shivering on the deck of the sinking ship; the effect of his exhortation; and the rescue of all on board.

As you read the account, you feel that, if the sailors believed Paul's declaration as to a revelation from heaven, it would put fresh heart in them to work, as it really did. Nor does it strike you that there is any contradiction between this positive assurance of safety to all and the subsequent warning as to the impossibility of saving the passengers unless the crew remained in the stranded bark.

Our philosophers, however, are astonished at your simplicity, and, or course, at the simplicity of the Apostle and the inspired historian. For if God had determined that all should reach the land in safety, how could it be affirmed that in any case some would be lost?

The Roman centurion had, I dare say, quite as much sagacity as these cavillers yet he urged no objection, but at once complied with Paul's counsels. And just so now. When in earnest, no man ever pretends that predestination has anything to do with his free agency. No farmer—though in theology the most fierce hyper-Calvinist—was ever heard of, foolish enough to neglect the cultivation of his fields, because nothing can be justify to contingencies, and, therefore, it is predetermined whether he shall reap a harvest or not. In a shipwreck no fatalist ever folded his arms, saying "If I am to perish, I will perish; if I am to be saved, I will be saved." When danger presses, the peasant and philosopher alike cry to God for deliverance, and put forth all their efforts. *It is only in idle speculations, or when seeking to lull their consciences in impenitence and disobedience, that the enemies of God insult him, by pleading his decrees as pretext for their indolence and passions.*

*I am going to offer you some thoughts upon this difficult subject, treating it first doctrinally, and then practically.* It is very seldom that such abstruse discussions find place in this pulpit; and now nothing is farther from my wishes than that any of you should be encouraged to leave the paths of pure, undefiled, simple piety, for the mysteries of tangled metaphysical polemics. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

If we are properly engaged about the plain duties of the Gospel, we will not be tempted to perplex ourselves with the subtleties of controversial divinity, any more than will a traveller, pressing homeward, wish to leap into every quicksand that he may fathom its depths, or to rush into every thicket by the wayside that he may try how far he can penetrate. It was through pride of reasoning that man fell. Revelation constantly assails the arrogance which impiously arraigns the credibility of the divine word, unless our puny intellects can comprehend things which it is the glory of God to conceal. The design of the Gospel is to humble his temper, and to nourish in us the spirit of "a little child," without which the mind will go on sounding its dim and perilous way, till it is lost in endless mazes, bewildered inextricably in dark, interminable labyrinths.

As, however, men affecting to be wits and geniuses are, in books and in

conversation, forever parading their flippancies on the question of predestination and free-agency, it is worth while to show them, once for all, how little they can take by their infidelity and ribaldry.

**I.** I am first to treat our subject doctrinally. And you see at once that it presents the very question which, century after century, has been the source of bitter controversy; which has not only supplied the sceptic with his sneers, but has exasperated pulpit against pulpit, church against church, and council against council. The problem to which I refer is that of God's decrees and man's moral agency, to solve which two systems have been advocated, two parties have been formed. Let us examine each of these systems, let us hear each of these parties, whom—that I may avoid the shibboleths of hostile religious prejudices and factions—I will designate as the Libertarians and the Necessarians.

The Libertarians reject the doctrine of predestination; they deny that god has foreordained all things. But, now, can this negation be even mentioned without shocking our reason and our reverence for the oracles of eternal truth?

I might easily show that nothing is gained by this denial, that it only removes the difficulty a little farther back. This system rejects predestination, and maintains that God has justify all men to act as they choose. But what is meant by a man's acting as he chooses? It is, of course, that he obeys the impulses of his own feelings and passions. Well, did not God endow him with these passions? Did not God know that if certain temptations assailed the creature to whom he had given these passions, he would fall? Did he not foresee that these temptations would assail him? Did he not permit these temptations to assail him? Could he not have prevented these temptations: Why did he form him with these passions? Why did he allow him to be exposed to these temptations? Why, in short—having a perfect fore-knowledge that such a being, so constituted and so tempted, would sin and perish—why did he create him at all? None will deny the divine fore-knowledge; and I at once admit that the mere foreseeing an event, which we cannot hinder and have no agency in accomplishing, does his own sovereign pleasure, calls an intelligent agent into being, fashions him with certain powers and appetites, and places him amid scenes where he clearly sees that temptations will overcome him—in such a case it is self-evident that our

feeble faculties cannot separate fore-knowledge from fore-appointment. The denial of preordination does not, therefore, at all relieve any objection, it only conceals the difficulty from the ignorant and unthinking.

But even if the theory of the Libertarians were not a plain evasion, it would be impossible for us to accept such a solution; for it dethrones Jehovah; it surrenders the entire government of the world to mere chance, to wild caprice and disorder. According to this system, nature, providence, grace are only departments of atheism; God has no control over the earth and its affairs; or—if that be too monstrous and revolting,—he exercises authority over matter, but none over the minds and hearts of men. "The king's heart is in the hands of the Lord as rivers of water, he turneth it withersoever he will";—such is the declaration of the Holy Spirit; but this theory rejects this truth. God exercises no control over men's hearts, consequently prophecy is an absurdity; providence is a chimera; prayer is a mockery; since God does not interfere in mortal events, but abandons all to the wanton humors and passions of myriads of independent agents, none of whose whims and impulses he restrains, by whom his will is constantly defeated and trampled under foot. A creed so odious, so abhorrent to all reason and religion, need only be carried out to its consequences and no sane mind can adopt it.

And this heresy is condemned on every page of the Bible. It is deeply to be lamented that theological partisans so often treat texts of Scripture, as hired advocates in our courts treat those witnesses whose evidence damages their cause,—cross-examining and brow-beating the clearest passages,—seeking to perplex their plain meaning—and to exhort from them a testimony they will not and cannot give. But after all ingenuity has been exhausted, how unequivocal is the language of inspiration. "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thought of his heart to all generations." "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" "And they prayed and said, Lord show whether of these two thou hast chosen that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship." "Whom God did foreknow he did predestinate, moreover whom he did predestinate them he also called." "Being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsels of his own will." Passages like these might be easily multiplied, but I prefer to take another course, and to establish the doctrines of the Sacred Oracles by a

sort of proof which is very striking, and which silences all cavil and sophistry.

The depositions to which I now refer are gathered from those narratives in which man's free agency is taken for granted or expressly affirmed, while at the same time, the entire event is ascribed directly to God's over-ruling decrees. Let us turn for a moment to these records, and let us begin with the transportation of Joseph into Egypt. Read the history of his mission to his brethren, of the conspiracy among these brethren to slay him, of Reuben's scheme to save his life and restore him to his father, of the arrival of the Ishmaelite merchants, of Judah's proposition to sell him to them, and of the cruel and unnatural traffic. There never was a transaction in which human passions—envy, hatred, revenge, cupidity—were more confessedly the sole ruling cause and motive from first to last. "And the patriarchs," said Stephen, "moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt." Yet the result, from beginning to end, is ascribed to God's purpose and decree. "And Joseph said unto his brethren, Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God." And the Psalmist utters the same declaration. "He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold as a servant, whose feet they hurt with fetters, he was laid in irons until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tried him."

Take, next, the fatal obduracy of Pharaoh. In the book of Genesis it is repeatedly said that "Pharaoh hardened his heart and sinned yet the more," but in the same chapters it is declared that "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh." And in the epistle to the Romans it is written, "For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout the earth."

In the first book of Kings, the people appeal to Rehoboam, to abate a portion of the burden under which they groaned. That the monarch seeks the counsel, first of the old men, and former companions of his father, and then of the young men who had grown up with. Wilfully rejecting the sage advice of the elders, he adopts the tyrannical measure recommended by the passions of his youthful associates. The consequence is, the revolt of the ten tribes. Here was an arbitrary decree of a despot, instigated by an evil heart and evil

counsellors; yet the whole is attributed directly to God's decree. "The king harkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying, which the Lord spake by Abijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the Son of Nebat."

In the same regal history, Ahab disobeys God; and the prophet is sent to warn him that, as a punishment, he shall be slain in battle. The monarch disguises himself so that he is not known; and "a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness, and he died." The archer aimed his shaft at no one, but discharged it "at a venture" against the confused masses. Yet it was winged and guided by God's unerring decree.

In the entire volume of the Book nothing is more fearful than the epitaph upon the soul of Judas Iscariot, spoken by the Saviour himself, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." You at once perceive that this sentence consigned him to everlasting misery. The Universalist can never evade this passage. For if, after myriads of ages, the lost soul shall be released and translated to heaven, those centuries of wretchedness will be only as a moment, as nothing, compared with an eternity of happiness and it would not then be true that the culprit had better never been born. But now this treason—though instigated purely by covetousness, the ruling passion of the apostate—was a part of God's prearranged purpose. "None of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scriptures might be fulfilled." "The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him, but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed, it had been good for that man if he had not been born." "Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled which the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus."

In fine, the great catastrophe of the Bible, the crucifixion of the Redeemer—if ever a deed was perpetrated by cruel, relentless malignity, it was the murder of that innocent benefactor of mankind. The actors in that tragedy were charged with heinous guilt in having "killed the Prince of Life," whom "with wicked hands they crucified and slew." Nor did these murderers attempt any palliation. "They were pricked to the heart," and cried out in anguish, "What shall we do?" Yet this conspiracy and its triumph only accomplished the predetermination of eternal wisdom and love. "Those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that

Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled." "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together: for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

If anything be certain, then, it is that the antipredestinarian system is wholly untenable. It is good for nothing, since it solves no difficulty, it stultifies our reason, it is practical atheism, and it contradicts the express assertions of the Bible.

This argument is highly pleasing to some of you, I perceive. I read your approbation in your countenances. I see you are ready to come forward and extend to me the hand of fellowship and cordial congratulation. "Certainly," I hear you exclaim, "all that you have advanced is incontestible; it is just what we firmly believe. None but an idiot can reject the doctrine of predestination. Reason and Scripture both condemn the heresy which leaves man a free, independent agent. We have always maintained this, and your reasoning ought to silence the presumption of those who proudly arrogate liberty of will and action." The men who thus speak belong to the other class I have mentioned; they are Necessarians; they hold that God not only foreknows but fore-determines all things that his decree controls irresistibly all matter, all mind, all feeling, all action; and therefore, that man's free agency is a tenet false, unscriptural, and absurd. Let us turn to this system, and examine it for moment. Now, in the very outset we encounter one objection to this creed, which amounts to a refutation, and which nothing can remove; it is the consciousness of free will and free agency which every man carries in his own bosom. Reason, refine, cavil as we may, one thing is certain, we feel that we are free agents. Consciousness is an inward faculty which informs us of what passes within us; and its intuitions are conclusive and final as to the principles of our mental constitution—just as the authority of the senses convinces us of what takes place in the outward world. No matter what metaphysicians and schoolmen say, I am not sure that I see the sun in the heavens, than that I act in accordance with my own unrestrained volitions. Suppose a man should construct an ingenious argument to prove that you do not see and cannot walk. You might not be able to detect the fallacy of his reasoning, but so long as you do see and do walk, you know that his logic is all false.

Just so in the case before us; the testimony of the interior sense is equally conclusive against all specious denials of our freedom. Indeed, if our will and conduct are not free, they are, of course, under compulsion; and it is impossible for conscience either to approve or to condemn our actions or our motives; the deliberate murderer is no more guilty than the innocent victim of brute force, who, in spite of his protestations is compelled to discharge a pistol into the breast of a stranger.

Whatever theological dogmas men may adopt, there are some original truths written in the very structure of our nature, and our moral responsibility is one of these primary truths.

But let us look a little more closely at this scheme of necessity, and see if it does not conduct us to issues quite as monstrous as those which have just shocked us in the opposite system. If man is not free, what then? Why, then, he is not accountable when he sins. If man be forced by necessity, it is absurd to predicate any moral quality of his actions, to call them either good or evil. If man be compelled, it is impossible to deny that God is the author of sin—of all the sin which is perpetrated. From conclusions so profane and repulsive as these, even the hyper-Calvinist and fatalist shrink back, yet they are committed inevitably to them by their creed.

This is not all. The system of the Necessarians is condemned by the Scriptures as unequivocally as that of their opponents. The cases which I have just now cited to establish the doctrine of predestination, are equally as convincing as to man's free moral agency. For you remember that the inspired writers expressly charge the crimes upon their authors, without the slightest intimation that God's decrees have anything to do with the man's guilt. In fact, they announce each of the doctrines now before us in the same sentence without any attempt to reconcile them, without seeming to be aware of any sort of contradiction between them. Recall the illustrations I submitted to you a moment since—the cases of Joseph, of Pharaoh, of Ahab, of Rehoboam, of Judas, of the crucifixion—and you will find them just as incontestable with reference to Liberty as to Necessity. They take for granted man's free agency, as well as God's sovereign and universal control. Indeed, it is manifest that every call, every threat, every exhortation, every exhortation in the Bible supposes that man is a free agent. If he be not free, if he be the passive victim of inexorable, irresistible destiny, the Sacred Volume is a compilation of

glaring inconsistencies—or sheer, downright falsehood and mockery. If a fixed fate has foredoomed men as mere machines, how can God utter those tender complaints of their conduct with which the Scriptures abound? If his decrees compel men, how can he so earnestly admonish and beseech them to repent and turn from their evil ways? If men are forced by God's pre-ordination, how can he utter that assurance, "As I live, I desire not the death of the sinner, but that he turn and live?" How could Jesus affirm that, if the mighty works done in Chorazin "had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes," and that if the mighty works done in Capernaum "had been done in Sidon, it would have remained until this day?" In a word, if God's purposes bind men inflexibly in chains, what is the meaning of that touching, weeping exclamation, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is justify unto you desolate!"

If you have followed me, I think you will confess now, that neither of the two classes indicated can be right. The Libertarian is plainly in error when he rejects the doctrine of predestination; and the Necessarian is as plainly in error when he rejects the doctrine of free agency. And these are the only two parties. I am aware that some theologians profess to belong to a third and moderate school: and they undertake to reconcile the difficulties of our subject by this solution:—that God, who appoints the end, appoints also the means. This is the proposition advanced by Dr. Chalmers in an admirable sermon upon the very text now before us. It is no doubt very true; but it elucidates nothing, it only removes the difficulty one step farther. The advocates of this thesis do not belong to a third class, they are Necessarians, and ascribe all events to God's decrees as rigorously as if no agent had been employed. In a former part of this discourse I remarked that those who admit God's foreknowledge, but deny his fore-appointment, gain nothing by the discrimination since, in the Creator, our minds can draw no distinction between foreseeing and fore-ordaining. I make a similar observation now as to the interposition of a medium. Nothing is gained by it. The unthinking may be thus satisfied; but it is an old axiom, that he who performs an act by another, performs it himself. In human affairs God never acts immediately, except when working miracles; he uses instruments and agents. These, of

course, are chosen by him; and if they are necessitated by his decrees—as is supposed in the case before us—the introduction of one or many agencies produces no modification in the system, which is that of mechanical force and stern compulsion. In these assemblies where you are compelled to listen in silence, a preacher may think that he has triumphed, when he thus disposes of an objection; but he deceives himself. His hearers see clearly that he has not fairly met the difficulty; he has only shifted it a little out of sight.

In the recital from which our text is taken, Paul announced by express revelation from heaven, that not a soul on board the ship should perish. Yet when the seamen were about to leave in the boats, he as confidently declared that unless they remained in the vessel the passengers could not be saved. According to the intermediate system, the Apostle was very inconsistent in this last admonition; since he must have seen clearly that if God had predetermined the salvation of all, he had also indefeasibly adjusted the means, and that his decree could no more be frustrated by the treachery of the mariners than by the winds and the waves.

In reference to predestination and free agency, there are, only two systems—that of the Libertarians, and that of the Necessarians. These schemes seem to our minds not only irreconcilable, but antagonistical. Yet the rejection of either involves us in consequences absurd and impious. And what is still more confounding, the Bible, with a directness and plainness admitting of no dispute or evasion, inculcates both of these conflicting doctrines, requiring our unmutilated faith in each, without even noticing the inscrutable difficulty and seemingly palpable contradiction by which our intellects are bewildered.

Thus perplexed and staggered, what are we to do? Thus far we have only been entangling ourselves in a labyrinth; following first a path which leads one way; then returning and pursuing another path running in the opposite direction; but every attempt involving us more inextricably, until we feel hopelessly lost. What are we to do? It is evident that there is only one hope justify us. We must confess our absolute blindness, and procure a guide who comprehends all the dark intricacies; one in whom we have perfect confidence; who can and will conduct us safely; and we must surrender ourselves to him. Suppose that two men born blind were to enter into a dispute as to the color of an object; one affirming that it is red; and the other that it is blue. It is clear that these discussions would be simple absurdities;

since neither of them possesses that sense by which color can be known. Mr. Locke gives the case of a blind man who insisted that he knew what the color of scarlet resembled; and when asked what, he answered "The sound of a trumpet." Their controversy could be decided only in one way. An umpire must be found who can see; and who will decide the question truly and they must submit to his arbitrament. This analogy illustrates exactly our condition as to the subject before us, which is confessedly beyond the reach of human faculties. But, now, can we secure such a guide as we have described? Where is the arbiter to be found, who perfectly comprehends these deep things of God, and to whom we may with perfect confidence refer the difficulty?

My brethren, the guide, the arbiter we seek is before us. It is God himself. He understands fully his decrees; he also comprehends man's free agency; and he declares as we have seen, that all our speculations are wrong; that both these doctrines are true; and, of course, that there is no discrepancy between them. I have shown that it is impossible for us to reject either of these great truths, and it is equally impossible for our minds to reconcile them. But here, as everywhere, faith must come to our aid, teaching us to repose unquestioningly upon God's veracity; reminding us that "secret things belong unto the Lord our God;" and rebuking the arrogance which demands that our intellects shall penetrate and reconcile those thoughts of the divine mind which are as high above our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth. With unspeakable condescension, God constantly invites us to confer and plead with him. "Come now," he says, "let us reason together." Only once, in all the Scriptures, does he silence the arguments of man by a stern, abrupt assertion of his sovereignty; and this is when an inquisitive objector has assumed the attitude of a caviller who, daring to believe less and resuming to comprehend more than is revealed, finds fault with his decrees because, as he pretends, they destroy man's moral freedom. It is this very presumption the Apostle cuts short by that sudden retort, "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

The pillar by which Jehovah led his people was luminous all night long, but in the day it became an impenetrable column of murky cloud; and it is thus God now reveals himself to us. His precepts and our duty are all so plain, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need nor err therein but if instead of pursuing our way humbly and earnestly, we seek to fathom the abysses of his adorable wisdom, we are baffled clouds and darkness are round about him,

"he makes darkness his secret place, his pavilions round about him are dark waters and thick clouds of the skies." And, as in the wilderness the blackness proclaimed the majestic presence as gloriously as the splendor, so now, "it is the glory of God to conceal a thing." His independence, his infinite superiority to all creatures, that reverential awe which is due to such a Being, require that much in his providence and everything in his secret counsels shall be inscrutable to man.

If from Paul the traveller, animating his harassed, tempest-tossed fellow voyagers, we turn to Paul the theologian, and ask how the immutable purposes of God can be harmonized with the perfect freeness of men he does not attempt to gratify our curiosity; he has but one answer, he exclaims, "O God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." And this temper—this humble confession of our incompetency, this profound submission of our reason to mysteries which are above us—is taught not only by inspiration but by natural reason. We have taken our text from the travels of an Apostle, let us borrow from another traveller a case of casuistry which has been well cited by his illustrious countryman, and which ought to be profitable to many now before me. This acute and accurate author has recorded much useful information concerning the Persians; and he tells us that among these Mohammedans the duty of remembering the limits of the human understanding is inculcated by the following curious anecdote.

"There were once three brethren who all died at the same time. The two first were men; the eldest having always lived in a habit of obedience to God; the second, on the contrary, in a course of disobedience and sin. The third was an infant, incapable of distinguishing good from evil. These three brothers appeared before the tribunal of God; the first was received into Paradise, the second was condemned to hell, the third was sent to a middle place where there was neither pleasure nor pain, because he had not done either good or evil. When the youngest heard his sentence, and the reasons on which the supreme Judge grounded it, grieved to be excluded from Paradise, he exclaimed, Ah, Lord, hadst thou preserved my life as thou didst that of my good brother, how much better would it have been for me. I should have lived as he lived, and then I should have enjoyed as he does the happiness of eternal glory. My child, replied God to him, I knew thee, and I knew, that hadst thou lived longer, thou wouldst have lived like thy wicked brother, and like him wouldst have rendered thyself deserving of the punishment of hell.

The condemned brother, hearing this discourse of God, exclaimed, Ah, Lord, why didst thou not confer the same favor upon me as upon my younger brother, by depriving me of a life which I have so wickedly misspent as to bring myself under a sentence of condemnation? I preserved thy life, said God, to give thee an opportunity of saving thyself. The younger brother, hearing this reply, exclaimed again, Ah, why then, by God, didst thou not preserve my life also, that I might have had an opportunity of saving myself? God, to put an end to complaining and disputing, replied, Because my decree had determined otherwise."

Let us, my brethren, study this fable, and be instructed by these ingenious heathen. Other teachers begin by proposing to their scholars the examples of those who have distinguished themselves in learning. Jesus commences by setting before us a little child, and requiring us to cultivate an humble, docile temper. The fact is, we are familiar with *names*, and we mistake this for a knowledge of *things*; we adopt a system and love that more than truth. The inspired writers never set themselves to build up well adjusted scientific schemes; they simply announce "God's testimony." But *we* must compact the truths revealed into a regular symmetrical body of divinity; we examine the Sacred Oracles, not to learn all they disclose, but with a fixed determination to defend our theory. Hence we study, not the Bible in its amplitude, but the authors who advocate our dogmas. And hence, too, we seek to wrest those Scriptures which conflict with the beauty and harmony of our ingeniously constructed systems.

Do you receive the doctrine of predestination? Certainly. To reject it, I would have to stultify my intellect, to discard prophecy, which is based upon this truth, to abjure the unequivocal teachings of the Bible, to believe that God has abandoned the earth to chance and disorder, and to plunge into I know not what absurdities. Well, then you do not receive the doctrine of man's free agency. Indeed I do; for otherwise I must renounce my own distinct consciousness, I must disbelieve the Scriptures, I must make God the author and yet the punisher of sin, I must precipitate myself into I know not what absurdities. I embrace both doctrines. Nay, more; I see clearly that if I reject either of these great truths and cling to the other, it will tow me away into fathomless depths of folly and impiety. But, how do you reconcile these two doctrines? Reconcile! I do not reconcile them at all. I am not required to reconcile them. Who made me a judge and reconciler of God's acts and

attributes and clearly revealed testimonies? No, my brethren; let us rather with Job exclaim, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther. Lo, these are parts of thy ways, but how little a portion is heard of him. I know that thou canst do everything there fore have I uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me which I knew not. Canst thou be searching find our God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven, what canst thou do? Deeper than hell, what canst thou know?"

For my own part, as I contemplate these two grand doctrines I seem to see two parallel lines stretching away into eternity with thousands of other lines, all of which my vision can pursue but a little way. How they can ever meet, or whether they meet at all, I have no means of deciding. They appear to be ultimate facts, between which we can discover no links, but which are perfectly harmonious in the Divine Mind. We can discern no connection between them; but it is preposterous to affirm that there is collision;—*preposterous* in the exact meaning of the word, since a prerequisite to such an assertion is a knowledge which we cannot possess.

When I affirm two distinct truths, you never refuse to believe each, unless I can show some connection between them. "There is such a country as England." "The sun is shining brightly." What would you think of his intellect who should say, Both these propositions are clear, but I will not receive them unless you show me the relation between them. Such a man you would pronounce a lunatic. Very well, now apply this reasoning to the doctrines before us. "god has preordained all things." "Man is a free responsible agent." Neither of these propositions can be denied; why do you reject either of them, unless I can show the connection between them? You will reply, Because they contradict each other. Now, this I deny, and this you cannot possibly prove. The whole matter is reduced to this single question: Can God foreordain all things, and yet form an intelligent being who shall be a perfectly free, moral, accountable agent? And it is clearly preposterous for any finite mind to attempt to answer that question; for the decision demands omniscience. God only can solve the problem, and, as we have his solution,—as he declares that he has peopled the earth with beings as free as if there were no decrees—our duty is plain. In this, as in other mysteries of Godliness, our speculations must cease, we must subject our "philosophy and vain deceit" to the

decisions of Revelation. Reason must ascertain what God says, and then both faith and reason must acquiesce in humility and reverence.

True wisdom is always humble. The wisdom which descendeth from above is so profoundly humble that it at once confesses its ignorance and says, "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." It feels that all our present knowledge are only puerilities which will be put aside when we become men—a sort of nescience which "shall vanish away" when our minds are emancipated from darkness. There is a region of truth inaccessible to argument and logic; there is a "sea of light" before whose excess of brightness our feeble intellects are dazzled into utter blindness. These domains we may one day fully penetrate. Now we can reach them, not by reasoning, but only by childlike love. And for true spiritual wisdom only one course remains. As to predestination and other kindred subjects we must "have faith in God;" we must not expect to comprehend all the parts and bearings of all things revealed in the Bible; we must never carry our systems farther than the teachings of the Word will justify; especially we must never impinge upon the clear doctrines of revelation. A profound philosopher has well remarked the "the wall of adamant which bounds human inquiry has scarcely ever been discovered by any adventurer until he has been roused by the shock which drove him back." All which is necessary to the perfect repose of a devout mind, is the knowledge, either that the truth has been ascertained, or that it is inaccessibly concealed in the abysses of light in which God dwells. As to the abstruse topics upon which we have been meditating, we may, therefore, rest from all speculations with perfect confidence. If we attempt to explain and reconcile the doctrines of predestination and free agency, we find impassable barriers hemming us in, the sharp adamant striking us back. But the proofs of these doctrines are irrefragable. Their harmony we must leave with God; it is an ultimate fact transcending our thoughts; but clear to that Intellect which is the supreme fountain of all light and love.

**II.** So much for our text treated doctrinally. The few moments which remain I devote to the practical lessons of our subject, for these are very important; darkness serving us for light; darkness teaching us more than light—even as night reveals more of the starry glories of the firmament than the day.

And, first, it will not be in vain that I have conducted you through the

intricacies of this discussion, if, once for all, we learn the folly of human wisdom, when in the presence of the deep things of God; if we are convinced that the philosopher must discard his "oppositions of science falsely so called," and must, with the peasant, meekly receive the communications which God has vouchsafed to man. Those who cavil at the mysteries of revelation, and those who pretend to solve them, always affect superior wisdom and penetration; but in fact they only betray want of thought. "I do not understand everything connected with this proposition, therefore I cannot believe it." The man who reasons thus will have a very short creed, for what truth is there, even in nature, which does not involve mysteries? Such language is simply foolish. For, there is nothing in them unworthy of a religion which is divine, they are "mysteries of Godliness" inspiring sacred veneration, teaching us to be holy. And whatever system we may seek to substitute for the Gospel—the religion of nature, infidelity, atheism—we cannot escape mysteries; we can explain nothing; we can only lose ourselves in fresh obscurities and difficulties. In heaven God promises that all shall be explained, as far as finite intellects can comprehend his conduct and perfections; but at present, every reflecting mind confesses that we are surrounded on every side by inexplicable enigmas. If anything be certain, if anything be true, elevating, worthy of all our confidence, it is the revelation contained in the Bible. Abandon that and we must surrender ourselves to universal scepticism.

There is, even among those who profess to be Christians, a want of that full confidence which the Bible challenges as a revelation from God. We must correct this lurking infidelity. When we consider God's relation to us, and the incompetency of nature and reason to instruct us as to our future destiny, a communication directly from heaven seems to be an indispensable part of the divine intercourse with this earth. And supposing that God's goodness and justice would cause him to make a revelation to man, there are only two ways by which it can be authenticated. There are, first, credentials conclusive to the mind; and secondly, internal evidence which convinces the heart—for the heart has its reasonings, and in religion they are prompter and surer than the deductions of the intellect.

Now, examined by each of these tests, the Sacred Oracles establish at once and forever their divine origin; and reason tells us that her highest office is to receive in all their integrity the things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear

heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, but which God hath revealed by his Spirit." To require God to reveal nothing which we cannot comprehend, is to demand of him more than he has done for unfallen angels, more than he can possibly do for any finite being. These pretexts are the stale cavils of philosophy flown with vanity and conceit. They are not only insane, but impious; for have these men any claims upon God? In a word, they are manifestly but the shifts and mere subterfuges of an evil heart; since if these objectors knew all they demand to know, their duty could not be made any plainer than it now is.

Theological prejudices are proverbially inveterate, and I do not expect that the arguments urged in this discourse will detach a single partisan from the creed to which he has long been bigoted; but surely the incomprehensibility of the divine mind ought to rebuke the fierce controversies which too often embitter the hearts of Christians; in waging which they entirely forget the admonition, that—though we understand all mysteries and all knowledge—we are nothing without charity. Marcellus said that, with all his imperial power, Tiberius Caesar could not give currency to a new word. Sectarian gladiators have unhappily invented and consecrated a good many new words, which have become the shibboleths of strife, bitterness and persecution. The two parties whom I have called Libertarians and Necessarians are well known in the churches by other names. And they have often been arrayed in hostile attitudes against each other, urging a war of uncompromising intolerance; for this is a melancholy fact that it has generally been about polemical abstractions, scarcely ever about moral duties, that theologians have fulminated their anathemas. Each of these factions has much truth; but each overlooks the fact that, as a mist is more dangerous than darkness, so partial truth is one of the most dangerous forms of error; that the most effectual method of perverting the Bible is to garble its teachings; and each has pushed its system so far as to trench upon other truths. How much uncharitableness, strife, hatred, malice would be avoided,—what peace, love, harmony would adorn the churches—if these partisans loved their dogmas less, and the unmutilated Scriptures more; if they would conquer their prejudices; if, instead of presumptuously seeking to reconcile God's ways, they would remember that what seem discords to us, are only hidden, pre-established harmonies, which shall one day fill us with admiration and adoration; if, in short,—instead of a mistaken, harsh, hard orthodoxy—they

possessed more of that reverence which is the sublimest faculty of man's nature, before which self is humbled into nothing, and God's ways are a vast infinitude edged with intolerable radiance—eternity spreading all around it and stretching far away as its background?

The subject we have been discussing applies to our duties. Let us pray for grace that we may acquiesce in all the mysteries of God's sovereignty, and yet hold inviolate all the strenuous activities of the life of faith. In a revelation from heaven there must be some mysteries; there will be much that no thought of man can fully reach—since it is wrapped in the very light in which God dwells unapproachable. But we would expect his will concerning us to be distinctly announced. And so we find it. Whatever is obscure, we clearly see our duty. In the narrative before us, there was no sort of doubt as to what was to be done. The assurance from heaven not only did not relax the earnestness of the apostle and the seamen, but it inspired fresh strength and ardor. And thus, if we are sincere, will it be with us in our religious duties. Take prayer for example. God promises to answer prayer, and we know he does answer prayer. Let us not perplex ourselves by curious speculations as to the manner in which our petitions can be granted, and how the prevalence of our supplications can consort with God's unchangeableness. Prayer is the cry of human weakness, guilt and misery. If we are thoroughly in earnest, we will be encouraged by God's promises; nor can any objection be drawn from the divine immutability, which would not equally prevent our planting, or toiling, or employing any means whatever to attain an object.

Again, we are under the most solemn obligations to seek the salvation of men; and we are only folding about us a fatal illusion, if we hope to escape this responsibility by pleading any decrees of God. When Paul was vehemently opposed in Corinth, the Lord said to him, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace, for I have much people in this city." Does the Apostle argue that if God had much people in the city, it was unnecessary for him to labor and expose himself to suffering? Just the reverse. He devotes himself with renewed zeal to his work, and in this he furnishes a pattern to us, and a reproof to that antinomianism which has too long been a pretext for indolence, covetousness, perfidiousness in the churches.

Lastly, and above all, let us learn to work out our "own salvation with fear and trembling." As a motive to this duty, the Scriptures assure us that "it is

God who worketh in us." Let us admit all the force and comprehensiveness of this motive. God worketh in me; then I can work. God worketh in me; then I will work. God worketh in me; then I must work.

Amidst all our ignorance and weakness, what we most clearly perceive is, the transcendent importance of religion, the love of God, the atonement of the Cross and salvation through that atonement. Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners. His blood cleanses from all sin. The Holy Spirit can deliver us from all our corruptions. The gospel is adapted to all our wants, and offers us its treasures without money and without price. All this we know. And we know, too, that God's hidden decrees do not at all affect our conduct and character. You are shocked at the guilt of Judas and of the murderers of Christ. No ingenuity can persuade you that they were innocent because their passions were overruled and accomplished what God had fore-ordained. Your conscience, then, seconds the declarations of the Bible on this subject.

And your reason seconds your conscience; for, after all your syllogisms to prove that the divine purposes hold and control man, nobody could induce you to leap into the sea, or to throw yourself from the summit of a precipice.

Apply this reasoning to the concerns of your soul. Lost and ruined as we are, a great salvation has been provided for us, and it is yours by faith in Jesus. God repels no imputation with such intense abhorrence as that which charges him with desiring the death of any sinner. "Oh, Israel," he exclaims, "thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Having—at such expense—wrought out a wonderful atonement, Jesus now calls you to turn to him and accept a full deliverance; he assures you he is not willing that "any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." "Come unto me," he cries, "and him that cometh I will in no wise cast out."

But, still—as Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved"—so I tell you this day, that unless you are found in Christ, you cannot be saved. It has been well remarked, that any fool can ask questions which no wise man can answer; and the simplest man in that laboring vessel might have proposed just such impertinent inquiries as we now every day hear. If God has decreed that all of us shall be saved, how can the escape of the sailors reverse that decree? If Infinite Wisdom and

Power have predetermined that "not a hair shall fall from the head of any of us," why need we take some meat, why "lighten the ship and cast out the wheat into the sea?" "why loose the rudder bands and hoist up the mainsail to the wind?" why need some "swim" and the rest seize upon "boards and broken pieces of the ship"? These and similar questions any idiot might have asked; but no man was idiot enough to waste time in such casuistry. On a sinking vessel people find very little edification in metaphysical dialectics; they are altogether too much in earnest to bewilder their minds with these unprofitable subtleties. In the hour of danger, he would be regarded as a lunatic, who should stop to reason as our pretended philosophers reason. Had any one of the passengers refused to bestir himself and resolved to stand by his orthodoxy, he would certainly have been drowned, in spite of all his unanswerable logic. And so, my friends, if you neglect the great salvation, you cannot escape; you will perish, and all your pleas and pretences will only expose you to shame and everlasting contempt.

Be warned, be wise, before it is forever too late. O, think, how short and uncertain our life is. Consider how perilous it is thus to defer that surrender to Jesus, which the word and providence and Spirit of God have so long been urging, and which you have so often secretly resolved upon. What is the great concern? "What?" you reply, "Why! the salvation of my soul, certainly. To abandon sin, to overcome the fatal spirit of procrastination, to receive the Gospel on the terms of the Gospel, to take up the cross and follow Jesus—this is the first great concern." Such, my dear hearer, has been your confession a hundred times; such is your confession now. But what then? Alas, you have lived, and you will leave this house to go on living, as if salvation were the only affair unworthy of your serious attention. Lay these things solemnly to heart. Go not all the way to the judgment, to discover that your destruction is unnecessary and willful and wanton.

Or, if you are bent on self-destruction—if no entreaties from God, no restraints of his providence, no solicitations of the Spirit, no expostulations, no tears of your Saviour can stop you—at least do not insult Heaven by pretending that you are waiting for more effectual influences. This plea admits that you feel some strivings of the Holy Ghost; why do you not comply with these? Why resist these, and desire more powerful movements? What is this, but openly to proclaim that you will try conclusions with the Almighty? that you are resolved to strive against your Maker, to yield nothing to him

willingly, to defy him as long as you can, and only to submit to a sad necessity when he shall compel you? Is there anything in Revelation—do you seriously think there is anything in the secret counsels of eternity—to justify the hope that God will thus be appeased? What, my beloved friend, what can you expect from such deliberate, unrelenting opposition to the Sovereign to the Universe? What must be the issue of such an unequal, disastrous, desperate conflict?

Let us adjure you—by the mercies of God and by the unspeakable danger of your soul, with only a brief and uncertain remnant of life justify you—to adopt a different course. "Hear ye and give ear; be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains." He is the incomprehensible Jehovah; but the mysteriousness of his counsels casts no obscuration over his wisdom and love. It is subliming, rejoicing exercise of faith, to feel that in God's ways there are heights and depths far out of our sight; to submit wholly to him; to ascribe all honor and salvation to him—of whom and through whom, and to whom are all things to whom be glory forever.

AMEN