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CALVINISTIC
CONTROVERSY

Wilbur Fisk

Calvinistic Controversy

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*Calvinistic Controversy / Embracing a Sermon on Predestination and Election
and Several Numbers, Formally Published in the Christian Advocate and
Journal.:*

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ADVERTISEMENT

The numbers following the sermon on predestination and election, were written at different times, and in some instances at quite distant intervals from each other. This will be received, it is hoped, as an apology for any want of connection or uniformity of style, which the reader may notice. And if any farther apology be necessary, it may be found in the fact, that the entire contents of the volume as it is now presented, were written in the midst

of other pressing duties. – And the same reason has prevented my giving the work such a thorough revision, as it should have had, before it was presented to the public, in the more set and imposing form of a book. Such a form was not originally thought of – and now that this is called for, the author is well aware that the public might expect a careful revision and correction of the whole. From this however, he must, of *necessity*, be excused. He has been able to do little more than correct the typographical errors. If the public have it, therefore, it must go “with all its imperfections on its head.” Only let it be understood, that *I do not send it out*. The publishers say it is called for; and I consent that it may go. The doctrines I believe, will stand the test of reason and Scripture, although some of the arguments by which they are defended may be found defective.

It was my original design to have added one or two numbers on election; but upon farther reflection, it appeared to me that enough had been said in the sermon on that point; and that at any rate, if Calvinian predestination, and the Calvinistic views of moral agency and regeneration, were found to be fallacious, the whole superstructure must fall of course. On these points therefore, we may safely rest the entire question between us and the Calvinists.

W. Fisk.

Wesleyan University, April 28, 1835.

A DISCOURSE ON PREDESTINATION AND ELECTION

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, Ephesians i, 4, 5.

In this passage, the kindred doctrines of predestination and election are brought into view. To discuss them, to notice some errors respecting them, and to exhibit what is believed to be the Scriptural and rational view of these doctrines, is the proposed object of the present discourse. In doing this, much that is new cannot be expected. The whole ground of this controversy has been examined and re-examined; and the various arguments, on both sides, have been urged and opposed, by the most able polemics in philosophy and theology. The most, therefore, that can now be expected, is to give a concise view of the subject, in a form and manner suited to the present state of the controversy, and to the circumstances of the present congregation.

It is hoped, at least, that the subject may be investigated in the spirit of Christianity; and that there will be no loss of brotherly and Christian candour, if there be no gain, on the side of truth. Yet, in a desire to give no offence, I must not suppress the truth, nor neglect to point out, as I am able, the absurdity of error, and its unprofitable influences on the minds of those who propagate or receive it. The truth should be spoken, but it should be spoken in love. Neither the subject, nor the age, nor the occasion, will admit of temporizing. With these views, we come to our subject, by examining,

I. Predestination in general;

II. Predestination, in its particular relation to the doctrine of election.

I. By predestination, we understand an efficient predetermination to bring about or accomplish any future event. But as God alone has knowledge to comprehend futurity, and power to direct and control future events; predestination, in a *proper* and *strict* sense, can only be used in reference to him. And with respect to God, predestination is that efficient determination which he has maintained from eternity, respecting the control, direction, and destiny of the laws, events, and creatures of the universe. – That God hath a predetermination of this kind, there can be no doubt; and therefore, on this fact, there can be no dispute. But the ground of controversy is, the unlimited extent to which some have carried this idea of predestination. Calvin, on this subject, says, “Every action and motion of every

creature is governed by the hidden counsel of God, so that nothing can come to pass, but was ordained by him.” The Assembly’s Catechism is similar: – “God did, from all eternity, unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass.” And Mr. Buck defines predestination to mean, “The decree of God, whereby he hath, for his own glory, foreordained whatever comes to pass.” With these definitions, which, it is seen, are the same in substance, agree all the Calvinistic divines in Europe and America. – To this view of predestination, others, and we confess ourselves of that number, have objected. We believe that the character and acts of intelligent beings, so far at least as their moral accountability is concerned, are not definitely fixed, and efficiently produced, by the unalterable purpose and efficient decree of God. Here therefore we are at issue. We believe, with the rigid predestinarians, that God hath fixed the laws of the physical and moral world, and that he hath a general plan, suited to all the various circumstances and contingencies of his government; but that it is no part of this plan, efficiently to control and actuate the human will. So far, therefore, as these ultra-predestinarians go beyond us, they affirm what we deny; and of course the burden of proof falls upon them. We shall first, then, hear and answer the arguments in defence of their system, and then bring up our arguments against it.¹

¹ Many objections have been made, by the reviewers, to my manner of stating the doctrine of predestination. It is objected, that the great body of Calvinists believe, no more than the Arminians, that God “efficiently controls and actuates the human will.” On a careful, and I hope, candid revision of the subject, however, I cannot satisfy

The supporters of this system endeavour to establish their views by a threefold argument – the foreknowledge of God – the necessity of a plan – and Scripture testimony.

1. The first argument is founded on foreknowledge. It is sometimes contended that predestination and foreknowledge are the same. This, however, by the more judicious, is not now insisted on. For it is self-evident, that *to know*, and *to decree*, are distinct operations; and to every one acquainted with the common definition of the terms, they must convey distinct and different ideas. And if these are distinct operations in the *human* mind, they must be also in the *Divine* mind, unless it can be shown that these terms, when applied to God, have an entirely different meaning from that by which they are understood among men. And as this cannot be pretended, the more common and plausible argument is, that the foreknowledge of God necessarily *implies* predestination. “For how,” they ask, “can an action that is really to come to pass, be foreseen, if it be not determined? God foreknew every thing from the beginning; but this he could not have known, if he had not so determined it.” “God,” says Piscator, “foresees nothing but what he has decreed, and his decree precedes his knowledge.” And Calvin says, “God

myself that the objection is valid. I am quite sure God must control the will, or he cannot, as Calvinists teach, secure the proposed end, by the prescribed means. It is readily granted that Calvinists deny *such a control* as destroys the freedom of the will. But it is the object of the sermon and of the following controversy to show that Calvinistic predestination is, on any ground of consistency, utterly irreconcilable with mental freedom. How far this has been done, of course, each will judge for himself.

therefore foreknows all things that will come to pass, because he has decreed they shall come to pass.” But to this idea there are insuperable objections. Prescience is an essential attribute of the Divine nature. But a determination to do this or that, is not essential to the Divine nature. For aught we can see, God might determine to make a particular planet or not to make it, and in either case the perfection of his nature is not affected. But *to know*, is so essential to him, that the moment he ceases to know all that is, or will be, or might be, under any possible contingency, he ceases to be God. Is it not absurd, then, to say the least, to make an essential attribute of Deity depend upon the *exercise* of his attributes? – the Divine prescience depend upon his decrees and determinations? It would seem, by this argument, that, if not in the order of time, at least, in the order of thought, and in the order of cause and effect, the exercise of an attribute preceded the attribute itself; and, in short, the attribute must be exercised, as a cause, to bring it into existence! To this monstrous conclusion we are led by following out this argument. And connected with it is another, equally monstrous and absurd. If God must predetermine events in order to know them, then, as the cause is in no case dependent on the effect, the decrees of God must be passed and his plan contrived, independently of his knowledge, which only had an existence as the effect of these decrees. What must be the character of that plan, and of those decrees, which were formed and matured without knowledge, we will not stop to examine, for the idea borders too closely

upon the ludicrous to be dwelt upon in a serious discourse. And yet I cannot see how this conclusion can be avoided, reasoning from such premises. It seems to us, therefore, altogether more consistent to consider that, in the order of cause and effect, the exercise of the Divine attributes is consequent upon their existence; and that the plan of the Almighty is the result of his infinite knowledge; and that the decrees of his throne flow forth from the eternal fountain of his wisdom. This idea, moreover, accords with the Scriptures: – “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.” “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” In these passages predestination and the decree of election are most clearly founded on foreknowledge. This, therefore, must settle the question: God foreknows in order to predestinate; but he does not predestinate in order to foreknow.²

But foreknowledge is pressed into this argument in another form. “The foreknowledge of God,” it is said, “is tantamount to a decree; because, inasmuch as God cannot be in a mistake,

² It seems, to the author of the sermon, but little better than trifling, to object, as some have, to this argument on foreknowledge, that “God must predetermine his works before he could certainly know what would take place; and hence, in the order of cause and effect, he must decree in order to know.” It is readily conceded, that, in the order of nature, the Divine Being could not foreknow that a world would certainly exist, until he had determined to create it. But was there no prescience back of this? Did he determine to create a universe, independent of a view of all the bearings in the case? If so, he created at random and in ignorance. If not, then a view of all the results preceded his determination to create; and thus we are led irresistibly to the doctrine of the sermon, that “God foreknows in order to predestinate,”

whatever he foreknows must take place – his knowledge makes it certain.” This is indeed shifting the argument; for if God’s knowledge makes an event certain, of course it is not his predetermination. But, according to this notion, every thing contained in the idea of predestination is implied in foreknowledge, which is only throwing the subject back on the ground first glanced at, that knowledge and decree are both one, which is obviously absurd. Beside, such an idea would make the scriptures that represent God’s foreknowledge as distinct from his decree and antecedent to it, worse than unmeaning: “Whom he did foreknow, them he did predestinate,” would mean, “whom he did predestinate, them he did predestinate” – and, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God,” would only mean, “that the decree of election was *according* to the decree of election!” the absurdity of which is too apparent to need comment. And it may be urged, farther, in reply to this argument, that knowledge or foreknowledge cannot, in the nature of things, have the least possible influence in making an event certain. It is not at all difficult to conceive how the certainty of an event can beget knowledge; but if any one thinks that knowledge is the cause of certainty, let him show it – to me such a connection is inconceivable. Whatever God foreknows or foresees, will undoubtedly come to pass. But the simple question is, Does the event take place because it is foreknown, or is it foreknown because it will take place? Or, in other words, Does God know an event to be certain because it is certain, or does his

knowing it to be certain make it certain? The question thus stated, at once suggests the true answer; for he would be considered a fool or a madman who should seriously assert that a knowledge of a certainty produced that certainty. According to that, a certainty must exist in order to be foreknown; and it must be foreknown in order to exist! From all which it appears that foreknowledge can have no influence in making a future event certain. Since, therefore, foreknowledge is not predestination; and does not, according to Scripture or reason, follow predestination as a consequence, and has no possible influence in making an event certain, no proof can be drawn from the Divine prescience in favour of the doctrine that *God hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass*.

2. But predestination is argued from the necessity of a Divine plan. "It cannot be conceived," it is said, "that God would leave things at random, and have no plan. But no alteration of his plan can take place upon condition that his creatures act in this or that way." But this argument is easily answered, at least for the present. For it assumes what ought to be proved; and what has not, to my knowledge, ever been proved, viz. that to deny Calvinian predestination, is to deny that God has a perfect plan. We acknowledge and maintain that God has a plan, one part of which is, to govern his responsible subjects, without controlling their will, by a fixed decree – to punish the incorrigible, and save those who repent and believe. Does such a plan imply the necessity of a change, "on condition that his creatures act

in this or that way?" If, indeed, it was necessary for God to decree an event, in order to foreknow it, this inference might be just. But as this is seen to be false, it follows that a perfect God, whose eye surveys immensity and eternity at a glance, and who necessarily knows all possibilities and contingencies; all that is, or will be, can perfectly arrange his plan, and preclude the possibility of a disappointment, although he does not, by a decree of predestination, fix all the volitions and acts of his subjects. Even in human governments, where the rulers can have no knowledge of the individuals who will transgress, or of the nature and extent of the transgressions, the principles and plan of government undergo no change to accommodate themselves to the contingent acts of the subjects. How absurd, then, to suppose that the all-wise Ruler of the universe will be subject to disappointment, unless he predestinate the transgressions of sinners, and the obedience of his saints! The truth is, in my view, this idea detracts from the wisdom of God; for the perfection of his plan, as they maintain it, is predicated on the imperfection of his attributes. But our view of the Divine plan accords well with our idea of his infinite nature. Over the universe, and through eternity, he throws his all-pervading knowledge – as he is in every point of wide immensity, so he is in every moment of long eternity – and can such a God be disappointed?

3. "But," say the advocates of this system, "supposing there are difficulties in this subject, the Scriptures abound with passages which at once prove the doctrine." If this is true, then indeed we

must submit. But the question is, where are these passages? After such a strong assertion, it would probably appear surprising to one unacquainted with this subject, to learn that there is not a single passage which teaches directly that God hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. Yet this is the fact. If this doctrine is taught in Scripture, it is in an indirect manner. Nor will it follow, because God hath predestinated some things, that he hath, therefore, decreed all things. All those passages then which have been so frequently quoted as proof of this doctrine, which only go to prove, that God hath predetermined certain events, are not proof in point. Where are the passages that say he hath decreed all things? We know of many which say of certain events that have come to pass, that God did not *command* them, nor *will* them; so that the abundant Scripture proof seems altogether on the other side of the question. It is argued, however, that certain acts of moral agents, even those acts for which they are held responsible, are, according to the Scriptures, the results of God's predetermination, and therefore it is reasonable to infer that all are. This general conclusion, however, is not contained in the premises; nevertheless, if the premises are true, if it can be proved from Scripture that God holds his creatures responsible for the results of his own decrees, such Scripture proofs would be strong arguments to ward off the objections that are brought against this system. For if it is consistent with a righteous God to make a moral agent responsible for one event which was the result of a Divine decree, upon the same principle, perhaps, he

might make him responsible for all, though all were decreed. Let us then look at those scriptures, "As for you," says Joseph to his brethren, speaking of their injustice to him, "ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good." Now without stopping here to inquire whether Joseph was inspired to utter this sentiment, we are ready to acknowledge, that there are a number of similar scriptures which teach that, in the results of the wicked acts of wicked men, God had a design and a controlling influence, and thereby made them subservient to his own purposes. He hath wisdom and power "to make the wrath of man praise him, and to restrain the remainder of wrath." But does he therefore decree the wrath itself? And is this wrath necessary to the accomplishment of his purposes? As well might it be said, that because a government, in quelling a rebellion, replenished its exchequer from the confiscated estates of the rebels, therefore that government decreed the rebellion, and was dependent upon it for the prosperity of the nation. Let it be distinctly understood then, that to overrule and control the *results* of an act is altogether different from making the act itself the result of an overruling and controlling power.

Again it is said, "The Lord hath made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." That the Lord hath made all things for his own glory, is a proposition easily understood, and doubted, I trust, by none; and this is evidently the meaning of the former member of this passage. The latter clause, if it helps the cause for which it is quoted at all, must

mean, that the Lord has predestinated men to be wicked, that he might make them miserable. But it is not necessary to make the text speak this shocking sentiment. We should do the text no violence to explain it thus – The Lord hath destined the wicked for the day of evil, and this shall be for his glory.

But there is another class of passages like the following: – “He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.” “He worketh all things after the counsel of his will.” “I will do all my pleasure.” But these passages establish nothing, in opposition to our views, unless it should first be proved, by other passages, or in some other way, that it is God’s will and pleasure to work *all things*, even wickedness, in the wicked. These scriptures prove that all *God’s works* are in accordance with his own will and pleasure; and that he will accomplish them in spite of the opposition of sinners. If it pleases him to form his moral government, so as to leave the responsible acts of his subjects unnecessitated by his decree, this he will do, for “he will do all his pleasure.”

But there is still another class of texts, which are supposed to favour the doctrine we are opposing, more than any others, viz. those passages which seem to represent God as bringing about and procuring the wickedness of the wicked. Like the following: – “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, that he should not let the people go.” “Now therefore the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets.” “He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.” “Him, being delivered by

the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands ye have crucified and slain.” On these and similar passages it may be remarked, that God blinds men and hardens their hearts judicially, as a just punishment for their abuse of their agency. And for this act of his, in blinding and hardening them, he does not make them responsible. But he holds them responsible for that degree of wickedness which made it just and necessary to give them over to this hardness of heart and blindness of mind. And since there are wicked men and lying spirits, they become fit instruments in deceiving and tormenting each other; and therefore God gives them power and liberty to go abroad, “deceiving and being deceived.” But how does this prove that God hath decreed sin? The idea that God hath made sin and wicked spirits the instruments of hardening and tormenting the incorrigible sinner, and finally of shutting the door of hope against him, has no kind of affinity to the idea, that he decreed the sin which occasioned this hardness, or ordained the wickedness of this lying spirit.

As to the passage from the Acts, none of us deny but that Jesus Christ was delivered up to suffer and die, by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; but it is most emphatically denied, that this or any other scripture proves, that the taking and slaying of Jesus Christ by wicked hands, was the result of the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. If any think otherwise, let them prove it.

Having stated and, as our time would permit, examined the

arguments in favour of the sentiment we are opposing, we are prepared to urge against this doctrine, not only that its arguments are unsound and insufficient, but also that the system itself is liable to the most serious and formidable objections.

1. This doctrine of predestination makes God the author of sin. Some acknowledge this, and expressly assert, that God is the “*efficient cause*” of sin. Others affirm it in fact, while they deny it in word. Take for instance the words of Calvin. “I will not scruple to own,” he says, “that the will of God lays a necessity on all things, and that every thing he wills, necessarily comes to pass.” In accordance with this, Piscator, Dr. Twiss, Peter Martyr and others tell us, that “God procures adultery, cursings, and lyings” – “God is the author of that act, which is evil” – “God, by his working on the hearts of the wicked, binds them and stirs them to do evil.” They deny, however, that God is the author of sin, because they say, “God necessitates them to the *act*, and not to the *depravity* of sin:” or, that “God does not sin when he makes men sin, because *he* is under no law, and therefore cannot sin.” But these are miserable shifts. Has not the *deformity* of sin come to pass? Then God has decreed this deformity. To deny this, is to give up the doctrine. But to acknowledge it, is to own that God is as much the author of the deformity, as he is of the act. Again, God doubtless decreed that sin should be *sin*, and not *holiness*; and it came to pass as sin, because it was so decreed. Is he not then the direct procuring cause? A thousand turns of this kind, therefore, are nothing but evasions. The *fiat* of God brought forth

sin as certainly as it made the world.

We are often told, when we quote Calvin and his contemporaries, that these are old authors; that modern Calvinists do not hold thus, and that they ought not to be accountable for these writers. But the fact is, we make them accountable only for the logical consequences of their own doctrine. The whole system turns on this hinge, “God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass.” For he that, by his will and decree, produces and causes sin, that makes sin a necessary part of his plan, and is the author of the very elements and materials of his own plan, must be the proper and sole cause of sin, or we have yet to learn the definition of common words, and the meaning of plain propositions. The distinction therefore, of *ancient* and *modern*, of *rigid* and *moderate* Calvinists, is more in word, than in reality. And it would add much to the consistency of this system, if all its advocates would acknowledge, what is evidently deducible from the premises, that God is the efficient cause of sin.

2. This doctrine of predestination destroys the free agency, and of course the accountability of man. That it destroys free will was seen and acknowledged by many predestinarians of the old school. And the opposers of Mr. Wesley and Mr. Fletcher violently assailed them on this subject. Mr. Southey informs us, in his Life of Wesley, that the Calvinists called this doctrine of free will, “a cursed doctrine” – “the most God-dishonouring and soul-destroying doctrine of the day” – “one of the prominent

features of the beast” – “the enemy of God” – “the offspring of the wicked one” – “the insolent brat of hell.” Others, and the greater part of the Calvinists of the present day, endeavour to reconcile the ideas of *necessity* and *free agency*. Man, they say, sins voluntarily, because he chooses or wills to sin; therefore he is a free agent. Hence they exhort sinners to repent, and tell them they can repent if they will. By which they mean, the only impossibility of their repenting, is in their will – their *cannot* is their *will not*. This has led many to think that there is no difference, between their preachers and the Arminians. But let us look at this subject a little, and see if there is not some sophistry concealed in this dexterous coil of words. God, according to this doctrine, secures the end as well as the means, by his decree of predestination. And therefore, as Calvin says, “every action and motion of every creature is governed by the hidden counsel of God.” The will, therefore, in all its operations, is governed and irresistibly controlled by some secret impulse, some fixed and all-controlling arrangement. It is altogether futile, then, to talk about free agency under such a constitution; the very spring of motion to the whole intellectual machinery is under the influence of a secret, invincible power. And it *must* move as that power directs, or it is the hand of Omnipotence that urges it on. He *can* act as he *wills*, it is true, but the whole responsibility consists in the volition, and this is the result of God’s propelling power. He wills as he is *made* to will – he chooses as he *must* choose, for the immutable decree of Jehovah is upon him. And can a

man, upon the known and universally acknowledged principles of responsibility, be accountable for such a volition? It is argued, I know, that man is responsible, because he *feels* that he acts freely, and that he might have done otherwise. To this I reply, that this is a good argument, on our principles, to prove that men are free – but on the Calvinistic ground, it only proves that God hath deceived us. He has made us *feel* that we might do otherwise, but *he knows we cannot* – he has *determined we shall not*. So that, in fact, this argument makes the system more objectionable. While it does not change the fact in the case, it attributes deception to the Almighty. It is logically true, therefore, from this doctrine, that man is not a free agent, and therefore not responsible. A moral agent, to be free, must be possessed of a self-determining principle. Make the will any thing short of this, and you put all the volitions, and of course the whole moral man, under foreign and irresistible influences.

3. Another strong objection to the doctrine we oppose, is, it arrays God's secret decrees against his revealed word. God commands men not to sin, and yet ordains that they shall sin, In his word, he sets before them, in striking relief, motives of fear and of hope, for the express purpose, as he informs us, "that they sin not;" but by his predestination and secret counsel, he irresistibly impels them in an opposite course, for the express purpose, as this doctrine informs us, to secure their transgression. *His* rule of action is in direct opposition to *our* rule of duty. And yet he is the author of both! Is God at war with himself,

or is he sporting and trifling with his creatures? Or is it not more probable than either, that the premises are false? When or where has God ever taught us, that he has two opposing wills? A character so suspicious, to say the least of it, ought not, without the most unequivocal evidence, to be attributed to the adorable Jehovah. In his word, we are taught, that he is “of *one* mind” – that his “ways are equal;” and who can doubt it? We are told, it is true, to relieve the difficulty, that this seeming contradiction is one of the mysteries of God’s incomprehensible nature. But it is not a *seeming* contradiction, it is a *real* one; not an insolvable mystery, but a palpable absurdity. *God prohibits the sinful act – God ordains and procures the sinful act – God wills the salvation of the reprobate, whom he has from all eternity irreversibly ordained to eternal death!* When I can embrace such opposite propositions by calling them mysteries, I can believe that two and two are more than four, that all the parts are less than the whole, and that a thing may be made to exist and not exist at the same time and explain them by a reference to the mystery of God’s incomprehensible nature.

4. In close connection with the foregoing objection, it may be added, that this system mars, if it does not destroy, the moral attributes of God. If he holds men responsible for what is unavoidable – if he makes laws and then impels men to break them, and finally punishes them for their transgressions – if he mourns over the evils of the world, and expostulates with sinners, saying, “How can I give thee up – my heart is melted within me,

my repentings are kindled together,” – “O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! how oft would I have gathered you, and ye would not,” – and still he himself “impels the will of men,” to all this wickedness – if I say God does all this, where is his veracity? Where is his mercy? Where is his justice? What more could be said of the most merciless tyrant? What, of the most arrant hypocrite? What, of Satan himself? What does this doctrine make of our heavenly Father? I shudder to follow it out into its legitimate bearings. It seems to me, a belief of it is enough to drive one to infidelity, to madness, and to death. If the supporters of this system *must* adhere to it, I rejoice that they can close their eyes against its logical consequences, otherwise it would make them wretched in the extreme, or drive them into other dangerous theoretical and practical errors. Indeed, in many instances it has done this – which leads to another objection to this doctrine.

5. It puts a plea into the mouth of sinners to justify themselves in their sins, and leads to Universalism and infidelity. They reason thus: Whatever God decrees is according to his will, and therefore right. And God will not punish his creatures for doing right. Whatever God decrees is unavoidable, and God will not punish his creatures for what is unavoidable. But “every action and motion of every creature is governed by the hidden counsel of God.” Therefore God will not punish any of his creatures for any of their acts. Now, who can point out any fallacy in this reasoning? If therefore predestination be true, Universalism is true, according to the universally acknowledged principles of

justice. And it is a notorious fact, that modern Universalism, which is prevailing so generally through the country, rests for its chief support on the doctrine of predestination. Others having seen, as they thought, that the Scriptures would not support the doctrine of Universalism, and that matter of fact seemed to contradict the above reasoning, inasmuch as men are made to suffer, even in this life, for their sins, have leaped over all Scriptural bounds into infidelity and philosophical necessity. I have personally known numbers who have been driven, by the doctrine we object to, into open infidelity. And it is well known, that the doctrine of fate, which is closely allied to Calvinian predestination, is the element in which infidelity “lives and moves and has its being.” And can this be the doctrine of the Bible? How much is it to be regretted, that our worthy pilgrim fathers should have sowed this Geneva seed in our happy country! The evils done to the Church are incalculable.

These, candid hearers, are some of the objections we have to this doctrine – objections so serious, and, as we think, so obvious, that you may well ask, What has induced good men to advocate it so long? It is, doubtless, because it stands connected intimately with the doctrine of unconditional election, and what have been called by Calvinists “the doctrines of grace.” But for unconditional election, predestination would not be desired, even by those who now hold to it; and but for predestination, unconditional election could not be maintained. Hence these have very properly been called “twin doctrines,” and must stand

or fall together. Let us pass then to the next proposition.

II. We come to examine predestination in its particular relation to election.

Several kinds of election are spoken of in the Scriptures. There is an election of individuals, to perform certain duties appointed by God: – thus Christ was God’s elect, for the redemption of the world; and Cyrus was elected by him to rebuild the temple. There is an election of whole communities and nations to the enjoyment of certain peculiar privileges, political and ecclesiastical, relating of course to this life: – thus Jacob and his descendants were God’s chosen people, to the enjoyment of religious and national privileges, from which Esau and his descendants, together with the whole Gentile world, were excluded; and thus, too, subsequently, the middle wall of partition, made by the former decree of election between Jew and Gentile, being broken down, the Gentiles became equal sharers with the Jews in the privileges of the new covenant, called the “election of grace.” This election is unconditional, and is believed to be the one spoken of in our text, and many other passages of Scripture. Of these, however, I shall speak more particularly in another place.

There is a third election – an election unto eternal life, and this is the one which has given rise to the great controversy in the Church. – Those who contend for predestination, as objected to by us, maintain that, “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are

predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, *without any foresight of faith or good works.*” Others, and this also is our doctrine, hold that “God did decree from the beginning, to elect, or choose in Christ, all that should believe unto salvation, and this decree proceeds from his own goodness, and is not built on any goodness of the creature; and that God did from the beginning decree to reprobate all who should finally and obstinately continue in unbelief.” Thus it is seen, from the statement of the two doctrines, that ours is an election of character, and so far as it relates to individuals, it relates to them only as they are foreseen to possess that character; whereas the other relates directly to individuals, without any reference to character. It is an absolute act of sovereignty – God elects them for no other reason or condition than because he chooses. He makes no account of man’s agency or responsibility in this decree of election, but it precedes and is entirely independent of any knowledge of the character of the elect. Our views of election, on the contrary, make it conditionally dependent on the responsible agency of man. In the one case, the sinner is made to receive Christ, because he is elected; and in the other, he is elected, because he receives Christ. From this difference, too, proceed other differences. The Calvinistic election, to be consistent with itself, requires that, as the end is arbitrarily fixed, so the means must be

also – hence the doctrines of irresistible grace, effectual calling, and infallible perseverance. Calvinian election, therefore, stands intimately allied to Calvinian predestination; and the whole forms a chain of doctrines differing materially from ours. And here we acknowledge we have a position to prove as well as our opponents. We assert that election to eternal life is conditional; they, that it is unconditional. We will first attempt to prove our position – then state and answer the arguments in favour of unconditional election – and finally, urge some objections against unconditional election and reprobation.

1. Our first argument in favour of conditional election to eternal life, is drawn from the position already established, that the decrees of God are predicated on his foreknowledge. And especially, that the decree of election to salvation, according to the Scriptures, is founded on the Divine prescience. “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son.” These scriptures seem to us decisive, that the decree of election rests on foreknowledge, and that this election is made, not according to the arbitrary act of God, but on the ground of sanctification and obedience. The doctrine, therefore, that men are predestinated to eternal life, “without any foresight of faith or good works,” must be false.

2. The rewardableness of obedience, or the demerit of disobedience, can only exist in connection with the

unnecessitated volitions of a free moral agent. The Scriptures abundantly teach, that to be saved, man must believe and obey; and hence they command and exhort men to believe and obey, and promise them the reward of eternal life if they do this, and criminate them, if they neglect it. But, according to the doctrine of free agency already explained, man's obedience or disobedience, if it has any just relation to rewards and punishments, must rest, in its responsible character, upon the self – determining principle of the will. And if this view of the will be correct, there is an *utter impossibility* of an unconditional election. For the very act of God, imparting this self-determining principle to man, renders it impossible, in the nature of things, for the Almighty himself to elect a moral agent, unconditionally. The argument stands thus – The Scriptures make man a responsible moral agent; but this he cannot be, if his will be controlled by foreign and unavoidable influences, therefore it is not so controlled: that is, man has within himself a self-determining principle, in the exercise of which he becomes responsible. This being established, we argue again – The doctrine of unconditional election necessarily implies irresistible grace, absolutely impelling and controlling the will. But this would be to counteract God's own work, and to destroy man's accountability; therefore there is no such irresistible grace, and, of course, no such unconditional election. And since there is an election to eternal life, spoken of in the Scriptures, it follows conclusively, if the foregoing reasoning be

sound, that this election is conditional. – Hence we may bring forward, in one overwhelming argument, all the numerous and various Bible conditions of salvation, as so many Scripture proofs of a conditional election.

3. The cautions to the elect, and the intimations of their danger, and the possibility of their being lost, are so many Scripture proofs of a conditional election. Why should the saints be exhorted “to take heed lest they fall?” “lest there be in them an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God?” “lest a promise being left of entering into rest, any should come short?” lest *they* should “also be cut off?” Why should St. Paul fear lest, after having preached to others, he should be a castaway? Either there is, or is not, danger of the elect’s being lost. If not, then all these passages are not only without meaning, but savour very strongly of deception. They are false colours held out to the elect, for the purposes of alarm and fear, where no fear is. Will it be said, that possibly some of those addressed were not of the elect, and were therefore deceiving themselves, and needed to be cautioned and warned? I answer, they had then nothing to fall from, and no promise of which to come short. Besides, to warn such to *stand fast*, seems to imply, that the Holy Spirit cautioned the reprobates against the danger of becoming the elect, which idea, while it intimates a very ungracious work for the “Spirit of grace” to be engaged in, clearly indicates, that there was danger of breaking the decree of reprobation! We ask again, therefore, What do these scriptures mean? Will it be

said, as some have argued, that these warnings and cautions are all consistent, because they are the very means by which the decree of election is made sure? But let it be understood, that the end is fixed, before the means; because Calvinism tells us, that this election is “independent of any faith or good works foreseen,” and that “God’s decree lays a necessity on all things, so that every thing he wills necessarily comes to pass,” and is therefore sure, “because he has decreed it.” The moment, therefore, God decrees an event, it becomes sure, and to talk of danger of a failure in that event, implies either a falsehood, or that God’s decree can be *broken*. But Calvinists, I presume, will not allow that there is any danger of counteracting or frustrating the plan of the Almighty. Hence there is no danger of the elect’s coming short of salvation. All the exhortations, cautions, and warnings therefore, recorded in the Scriptures, are false colours and deceptive motives. They are like the attempts of some weak parents, who undertake to frighten their children into obedience, by superstitious tales and groundless fears. God knows, when he is giving out these intimations of danger, that there is no such danger; his own eternal, unchangeable decree had secured their salvation before the means were planned – all this if election is unconditional. But far be this from a God of truth. If he exhorts his creatures to “make their election sure,” *he* has not made it sure. – If he teaches them to fear, lest they fail of the grace of God, there is doubtless real danger. The conclusion therefore is irresistible, that Cod hath suspended his decree of election to

eternal life, on conditions; “He that believeth: shall be saved.”

4. This accords also with Christian experience. What is it that produces much fear and trembling in the mind of the awakened sinner? Why does he feel that there is but a step between him and destruction? Is it fancy, or is it fact? If it is imagination merely, then all his alarm is founded in deception, and he has either deceived himself, or the Spirit of God hath deceived him. In either case, this alarm seems necessary, in order to lead him to Christ. That is, it is necessary for the conversion of one of the elect that he be made to believe a lie. But if it be said, that it is no lie, for he is really in danger, then we reply again, the decree of God hath not made his election sure, and of course, therefore, it is conditional.

5. Express passages of Scripture teach a conditional election. We have time only to notice a few of them. Matt. xxii, 14, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” This passage, with the parable of the wedding that precedes it, teaches that the *choice* was made subsequently to the call, and was grounded on the fact, that those chosen had actually and fully complied with the invitation, and had come to the wedding duly prepared. John xv, 19, “If ye were of the world, the world would love you, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” This passage teaches that Christ’s disciples were once of the world, and that he had chosen them out of the world, and this *choice* evidently refers to that time when they became of a different character from the

world; for then it was, and in consequence of that election, that the world hated them. – 2 Thess. ii, 13, “Because God hath from the beginning, *chosen* you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Here is a condition plainly expressed. This is not an election *unto* sanctification, but an election *through* or *by* sanctification and faith unto salvation.

From the whole then it appears, that the Holy Scriptures, the Divine attributes and government, and the agency of man, stand opposed to an unconditional, and are in favour of a conditional election.

In opposition to these arguments, however, and in favour of unconditional election, our opponents urge various scriptures, which, as they think, are strong and incontrovertible arguments in favour of their system. And as these scriptures are their strong and only defence, it is proposed that they should be noticed. The limits of this discourse, however, will admit of but a short notice, and that not of individual texts, but of classes of texts.

1. The first class of passages that we will now examine, which are supposed to favour the idea of unconditional election, is those that speak of a predestination *unto* holiness. Our text is one of the strongest instances of this kind, “He hath chosen us from the foundation of the world, that we should be holy – having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons,” &c. See also Rom. viii, 29, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son,” and “whom he did predestinate – he called – justified – and sanctified.” The

argument upon these and similar passages is, that the decree of predestination could not be founded on their faith or holiness; because they were predestinated to *become* holy – the decree of predestination had their holiness for its object and end. But if these passages had an allusion to a personal election to eternal life, they would not prove unconditional election, “because,” to use the language of another, “it would admit of being questioned, whether the choosing in Christ, before the foundation of the world here mentioned, was a choice of certain persons *as men merely*, or as *believing* men, which is certainly the most rational.” This exposition must necessarily be given to the passage from the Romans, since those who were the subjects of predestination, were first *foreknown*: foreknown, not merely as existing, for in this sense *all* were foreknown, but foreknown, as possessing something which operated as a reason why *they* should be elected, rather than others: foreknown doubtless as believers in Christ, and as such, according to the plan and decree of God, they were to be made conformable to the image of Christ’s holiness here, and glory hereafter. And according to the same Divine plan, the order of this work was, 1. The call; 2. Justification; 3. Glorification. And this interpretation, which so obviously upon the face of it is the meaning of the passage from Romans, would also be a good meaning to the passage in Ephesians, if that passage should be understood in reference to personal election. But I do not so understand it; and I think any unprejudiced reader, by looking at the context, and especially from the 9th to

the 11th verses inclusive, in this chapter, and at most of the 2d chapter, will perceive that the apostle is here speaking of that general plan of God, which had been fixed from the beginning, of admitting the Gentiles as well as the Jews to the privileges of the covenant of grace, on equal terms and conditions. Thus the middle wall of partition was to be broken down between Jew and Gentile; and this was the mystery which was concealed for ages, not being understood even by the Jews themselves, but then by the Gospel was brought to light. According to this plan, the Ephesians and all other Gentiles were chosen or elected to these Christian privileges, the very design and purpose of which were to make them holy; and in the improvement of which, according to the prescribed conditions of faith in Christ, and repentance toward God, they should become his adopted children.

This fore appointing of the Gentiles to the privileges of the gracious covenant, is the election most spoken of in the New Testament. – And the reason why it was so often introduced, especially in the writings of Paul, who was the chief apostle to the Gentiles, was, because the Jews so uniformly and earnestly opposed this feature of Christianity. They could not be reconciled to the idea, that the peculiar and distinctive character of their theocracy and ecclesiastical policy should be so changed, or that the dealings of God with the world should be explained in such a manner as to give *them* no superior claims, in the privileges of the Divine covenant, over the Gentiles. They considered themselves to be God's elect and favourite people,

but the Gentiles were reprobates. The apostles felt themselves under the strongest obligations to oppose these notions, not only because, if allowed, they would operate as a barrier to the diffusion of the Gospel among the heathens, and thus the designs of Divine mercy to the world would be thwarted, but also because these Jewish sentiments were in direct opposition to the grace of God. They implied, that the original design of God in favouring the Jews, was founded, not upon his mere mercy and grace, but upon some goodness in them or their fathers. Hence they not only limited the blessings of the Gospel, but they also corrupted its gracious character, and thereby fed their own Pharisaic pride, and dishonoured God. This will open the way for explaining many other scriptures which the Calvinists press into their service.

2. Especially will it assist in explaining those passages which speak of election as depending solely on the sovereign will of God. The strongest of these are in the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. This portion of revelation is the strong hold, as is supposed, of Calvinism. Whereas, we humbly conceive that *there is not one word* in the whole chapter, of unconditional and personal election to eternal life. It is only necessary to read that epistle carefully, to see that the apostle is combatting that exclusive and Pharisaic doctrine of the Jews, already alluded to, and is proving in a forcible strain of argumentation, from reason and Scripture, that the foundation of the plan of salvation for sinners, was the goodness and unmerited love of God – that

all, both Jews and Gentiles, were sinners, and therefore stood in the same relation to God – all equally eligible to salvation, and must, if saved at all, be saved on the same terms. To prove this, he argues strenuously, that God's favour to the Jews, as a nation, was not of any goodness in them, but of his own sovereign will and pleasure, so that his covenant of favour with the Hebrews, and his covenant of grace which embraced the Gentiles, was "not of works, lest any man should boast," "not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." The apostle shows them, too, that the covenant made with Abraham was not for circumcision, nor for the works of the law, so far as it affected him or his posterity, because it was made while Abraham was in uncircumcision, and on the condition of faith. He argues farther, that this election of the Jews to the enjoyment of these national and ecclesiastical privileges, was not because they were children of Abraham, for Ishmael was a child of Abraham, and yet he and his posterity were rejected; nor yet because they were the children of Abraham through Isaac, because Esau and his posterity were reprobated from these national privileges, while Jacob and his posterity were the chosen seed – not chosen to eternal life, because many of them perished in sin and unbelief, but to the peculiar privileges of God's covenant people. And all this because it was the good pleasure of his will. And as a sovereign, he had the same right to elect the Gentiles to the enjoyment of the covenant of mercy, and upon the same conditions of faith. The apostle concludes

this reasoning by an argument which cuts off entirely the idea of unconditional personal election and reprobation. He informs us, that the reason why the unbelieving Jews did not attain to personal righteousness, was “because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law;” and the Gentiles attained to personal righteousness, because they sought it by faith. Hence, those that were not his people, became his people, and those that were not beloved, became beloved – and these, “not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” Whereas, if the doctrine we oppose be true, the elect were *always* his people, and *always* beloved, and that because he pleased to have it so. That portion of Scripture, therefore, on which Calvinism leans for its greatest support, not only affords it no aid, but actually teaches a different doctrine. There is indeed something of mystery hanging over the providence of God, in bestowing peculiar advantages on some, and withholding them from others. But on this subject much light is cast from various considerations which we have not time to enlarge upon; but especially from that wholesome and consistent Scripture doctrine, that “it is required of a man according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not.” This removes at once all complaint of Jew and Gentile, and authorizes the reply, so often misapplied, “Who art thou that repliest against God?” As a sovereign, God has a right to make his creatures differ in these things, so long as he requires only as he gives. But this differs as widely from the Calvinistic idea of sovereignty, as *justice* from *injustice*, as *equity* from *iniquity*. In fact, God no where in the

Scripture, places the election of individuals to eternal life, solely on the ground of his sovereignty, but uniformly on the ground of their complying with the conditions of the covenant of grace. Hence his people are a *peculiar people* – his sheep *hear his voice and follow him* – they are *chosen out of the world* – they are *in Christ*, not by an eternal decree of election, but *by faith* – for “if any man be *in Christ*, he is a *new creature*” – and of course, he is not *in him*, until he is a “new creature” – then, and not before, they become his, and he seals them as such, “In whom, *after that ye believed*, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” But if they were elected from eternity, they would be his when they did not *hear his voice*, and were not *new creatures*.

3. From what has been said, we can easily answer a third class of scriptures which the Calvinists dwell upon to support their system – viz, those which declare salvation to be of *grace* and not of *works*. Of these there is evidently a large catalogue of very express and unequivocal passages. Take two or three for an example of the whole, “Even so then, at the present time, there is a remnant, according to the election of grace, and if it be by grace then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work.” “By grace ye are saved.” “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of his children, &c, to the praise of the glory of his grace.” “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Now we profess

to believe these scriptures as unqualifiedly and as cordially as the Calvinists; and we think them perfectly in accordance with our views of election. For we believe, as has been already stated, that God's plan for saving sinners originated entirely in his love to his undeserving creatures. There was nothing in all the character and circumstances of the fallen family, except their sin and deserved misery, that could claim the interposition of God's saving power. The way of executing his gracious plan, and rendering it available in any case, he of course, as a sovereign, reserved to himself. And if he saw that a conditional election was best suited to the principles of his government, and the responsibility of man, shall it be said, this cannot be, for it destroys the idea of grace? *Cannot* a conditional election be of grace? Let the intelligent and candid answer. Even many of the Calvinists acknowledge that *salvation* is conditional, and yet it is of grace; for "by grace ye are saved." Now if salvation is conditional and yet of grace, why not election? Let Calvinists answer this question.

But that our doctrine of election is of grace, will appear evident, I think, from the following considerations. 1. It was pure unmerited love that moved God to provide salvation for our world. 2. The Gospel plan, therefore, with all its *provisions* and *conditions*, is of grace. Not a step in that whole system, but rests in grace, is presented by grace, and is executed through grace. 3. Even the power of the will to choose life, and the conditions of life, is a *gracious power*. A fallen man, without grace, could no more choose to submit to God than a fallen angel.

Herein we differ widely from the Calvinists. They tell us man has a *natural* power to choose life. If so, he has power to get to heaven without grace! We say, on the contrary, that man is utterly unable to choose the way to heaven, or to pursue it when chosen, without the grace of God. It is grace that enlightens and convinces the sinner, and strengthens him to seek after and obtain salvation, for “without Christ we *can do nothing*.” Let the candid judge between us, then, and decide which system most robs our gracious Redeemer of his glory, that which gives man a *native* and *inherent* power to get to heaven of himself, or that which attributes all to grace. 4. Finally, when the sinner repents and believes, there is no merit in these acts to procure forgiveness and regeneration, and therefore, though he is *now*, and *on these conditions*, elected, and made an heir of salvation, yet it is for Christ’s sake, and “not for works of righteousness which he has done.” Thus we “bring forth the top stone with shouting, crying *grace, grace*, unto it.” Having gone over and examined the arguments in favour of unconditional election, we come to the last part of our subject; which was to urge some objections against this doctrine.

1. The doctrine of the unconditional election of a part, necessarily implies the unconditional reprobation of the rest. I know some who hold to the former, seem to deny the latter; for they represent God as reprobating sinners, in view of their sins. When all were sinners, they say God passed by some, and elected others. Hence, they say the decree of damnation against

the reprobates is just, because it is against *sinners*. But this explanation is virtually giving up the system, inasmuch as it gives up all the principal arguments by which it is supported. In the first place, it makes predestination dependent on foreknowledge; for God first foresees that they will be sinners, and then predestinates them to punishment. Here is one case then, in which the argument for Calvinian predestination is destroyed by its own supporters. But again if God must fix by his decree all parts of his plan, in order to prevent disappointment, then he must fix the destiny of the reprobates, and the means that lead to it. But if he did not do this, then the Calvinistic argument in favour of predestination, drawn from the Divine plan, falls to the ground. Once more: this explanation of the decree of reprobation destroys all the strongest Scripture arguments which the Calvinists urge in favour of unconditional election. The passages, for instance, in the ninth of Romans, which are so often quoted in favour of Calvinian election, are connected with others, equally strong, in favour of unconditional reprobation. When it is said, "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy," it is said also, "Whom he will he hardeneth." He that "makes one vessel unto honour, maketh another unto dishonour." He that says, "Jacob have I loved," says also in the same manner, "Esau have I hated." Now if these relate to personal election to eternal life, they relate also to personal reprobation to eternal death. But if there is any explanation, by which these are showed not to prove unconditional reprobation to eternal

death, the same principle of explanation will, and *must* show, that they do not prove Calvinistic election. From henceforth, therefore, let all those Calvinists who profess not to believe in unconditional reprobation, cease to urge, in favour of their system, any arguments drawn from the foreknowledge of God, or the necessity of a Divine plan, or from those scriptures that are most commonly quoted in favour of their doctrine. But when they do this, their system must necessarily fall; for all its main pillars will be removed. But I have not done with this objection yet. Whoever maintains that “God hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass,” must also hold to unconditional reprobation. Does it come to pass, that some are lost? Then this was ordained. Was sin necessary, as a pretence to damn them? Then this was ordained. From these and other views of the subject, Calvin was led to say, that “election could not stand without reprobation,” and that it was “quite silly and childish” to attempt to separate them. All, therefore, who hold to the unconditional election of a part of mankind to eternal life, *must*, to be consistent with themselves, take into their creed, the “horrible decree” of reprobation. – They must believe that in the ages of eternity God determined to create men and angels for the express purpose to damn them eternally! That he determined to introduce sin, and influence men to commit sin, and harden them in it, that they might be fit subjects of his wrath! That for doing as they were impelled to do, by the irresistible decree of Jehovah, they must lie down for ever, under the scalding phials of his vengeance in the

pit of hell! To state this doctrine in its true character, is enough to chill one's blood – and we are drawn by all that is rational within us, to turn away from such a God with horror, as from the presence of an Almighty Tyrant.

2. This doctrine of election, while it professes to vindicate free grace and the mercy of God, destroys them altogether. To the reprobates, there is certainly no grace or mercy extended. Their very existence, connected as it necessarily is with eternal damnation, is an infinite curse. The temporal blessings which they enjoy, the insincere offers that are held out to them, and the Gospel privileges with which they are mocked, if they can be termed grace at all, must be called *damning grace*. For all this is only fattening them for the slaughter, and fitting them to suffer, to a more aggravated extent, the unavoidable pains and torments that await them. Hence Calvin's sentiment, that "God calls to the reprobates, that they may be more deaf – kindles a light, that they may be more blind – brings his doctrine to them, that they may be more ignorant – and applies the remedy to them, that they may not be healed," is an honest avowal of the legitimate principles of this system. Surely, then, no one will pretend, that, according to this doctrine, there is any grace for the reprobate. And perhaps a moment's attention will show, that there is little or none for the elect. It is said, that God, out of his mere sovereignty, without any thing in the creature to move him thereto, elects sinners to everlasting life. But if there is nothing in the creature to move him thereto, how can it be called *mercy* or *compassion*?

He did not determine to elect them because they were miserable, but because he pleased to elect them. If misery had been the exciting cause, then as all were equally miserable, he would have elected them all. Is such a decree of election founded in love to the suffering object? No: *it is the result of the most absolute and omnipotent selfishness conceivable*. It is the exhibition of a character that sports most sovereignly and arbitrarily, with his Almighty power, *to create, to damn, and to save*.

Some indeed pretend that, at any rate, *salvation* is of grace, if election is not, because God saves *miserable, perishing* sinners. But who made them miserable perishing sinners? Was not this the effect of God's decree? And is there much mercy displayed in placing men under a constitution which necessarily and unavoidably involves them in sin and suffering, that God may afterward have the sovereign honour of saving them? Surely the *tenderest* mercies of this system are cruel – its brightest parts are dark – its boasted mercy hardly comes up to sheer justice, even to the elect; since they only receive back what God had deprived them of, and for the want of which they had suffered perhaps for years; and to obtain which, they could do nothing even as a condition, until God by his sovereign power bestowed it upon them. And as for the reprobates, the Gospel is unavoidably to them, a savour of death unto death. To them Christ came, that they might have death, and that they might have it more abundantly. Thus, turn this system as you will, it sweeps away the mercy and goodness of God, destroys the grace of the Gospel,

and in most cases, transforms even the invitations and promises into scalding messages of aggravated wrath.

3. The doctrine we oppose makes God partial and a respecter of persons; contrary to express and repeated declarations of Scripture. For it represents God as determining to save some and damn others, without reference to their character, all being precisely in the same state. To deny this, is to acknowledge that the decree of election and reprobation had respect to character, which is to give up the doctrine. Some indeed pretend, that the decree of election was unconditional, but not the decree of reprobation. But this is impossible; for there could be no decree of election, only in view of the whole number from which the choice was to be made; and the very determination to select such a number, and those only, implied the exclusion of all the rest. If it be said, as the Sublapsarians contend, that the decree of election did not come in until all were fallen, or viewed in the mind of God as fallen; and therefore since all might have been justly damned, there was no injustice to those who were left, though some of the guilty were taken and saved; we reply, That even this would not wholly remove the objection of partiality. But we need not dwell here, because we have a shorter and more decisive way to dispose of this argument. The truth is, it does not cover the whole ground of our objection. Had God nothing to do with man until his prescient eye beheld the whole race in a ruined state? How came man in this state? He was plunged there by the sin of his federal head. But how came *he* to sin? “Adam sinned,”

says Calvin, "because God so ordained." And so every one must say, that believes God foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. Taking all the links together, they stand thus: – God decreed to create intelligent beings – he decreed that they should all become sinners and children of wrath – and it was so. He then decreed that part of those whom he had constituted heirs of wrath, should be taken, and washed, and saved, and the others left to perish; and then we are told there is no unjust partiality in God, since they all deserve to be damned! What a singular evasion is this! God wishes to damn a certain portion of his creatures, and save the rest; but he cannot do this without subjecting himself to the charge of partiality. To avoid this, he plunges them all into sin and ruin, and forthwith he declares them all children of wrath, and heirs of hell. But in the plenitude of his grace, he snatches some from the pit of ruin, and leaves the rest in remediless wo! Is such a supposition worthy of our righteous God? – Does it accord either with his justice or wisdom? Reason, with half an eye, can see through the flimsy veil, and discover the weakness of the device. I know an attempt has been often made to charge these consequences upon our system, as well as upon the Calvinistic doctrine. For if it is acknowledged that man is born depraved, and this depravity is damning in its nature, does it not follow, it is asked, that all deserve to perish? And therefore God may elect some and justly pass by the rest. I answer – Although all moral depravity, derived or contracted, is damning in its nature, still, by virtue of the atonement, the destructive effects of derived

depravity are counteracted; and guilt is not imputed, until by a voluntary rejection of the Gospel remedy, man makes the depravity of his nature the object of his own choice. – Hence, although abstractly considered, this depravity is destructive to the possessors, yet through the grace of the Gospel, *all* are born free from condemnation. So the Apostle Paul, “As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men, unto justification of life.” In accordance with these views also, the ground of condemnation, according to the Scriptures, is not our native depravity; but the sinner is condemned for *rejecting Christ*, – for *refusing* to occupy upon the *talents given*, – for *rejecting light*, – for *quenching the Spirit*, – for *unbelief*. Here then is the difference on this point between the Calvinists and us. They hold that God, by his decree, plunged Adam and all his race into the pit of sin, from which none of them had the means of escape; but by an omnipotent act of partial grace, he delivers a part, and the remainder are left unavoidably to perish. We, on the contrary, believe that by Adam’s unnecessitated sin he, and in him all his posterity, became obnoxious to the curse of the Divine law. As the first man sinned personally and actively, he was personally condemned; but as his posterity had no agency or personal existence, they could only have perished seminally in him. By the promise of a Saviour however, our federal head was restored to the possibility of obtaining salvation, through faith in the Redeemer. And in this restoration, *all* the seminal generations

of men were included. Their possible and prospective existence was restored; and their personal and active existence secured. And with this also, the possibility of salvation was secured to all. To such as never come to a personally responsible age, this salvation was secured unconditionally by Christ; to *all* those who arrived to the age of accountability, salvation was made possible, on equal and impartial conditions. Thus, while on our principle, there is not the slightest ground for a charge of partiality; on the Calvinistic principle, the charge seems to lie with all its weight. It makes God, in the worst sense of the terms, *partial, and a respecter of persons.*

4. This doctrine is objectionable, because, contrary to express and repeated passages of Scripture, it necessarily limits the atonement. It will surely not be expected, that we should attempt to prove that Christ “tasted death for every man” – that he “gave himself a ransom for all” – that he “died for all” – that he became “a propitiation for the sins of the whole world” – because, these are so many express Scripture propositions, and rest directly on the authority of God. And while these stand, the doctrine of particular and unconditional election must fall, for the two doctrines are incompatible. That particular election and partial redemption must stand or fall together, has been acknowledged, and is still maintained by most Calvinists; and therefore they have endeavoured to explain away those passages, which so clearly declare that “Christ died for all.” But in this work they have found so many difficulties, that others, and among them most of the

Calvinistic clergy in New-England, have acknowledged a general redemption, and have undertaken to reconcile with it the doctrine of particular election and reprobation. But this reconciliation is as difficult as the other. To say nothing now of the utter uselessness of making an atonement for the reprobates, unless for the purpose of making their unavoidable damnation more aggravated, we would ask, What is the object of the atonement? Let these very Calvinists themselves answer. They tell us, that its object was, to open the way, by which it might be possible for sinners to be saved. But has the atonement made it possible for the reprobates to be saved? If so, then perhaps they will be saved, and therefore the idea of unconditional election and reprobation is false. But if the atonement has only made it possible for the elect to be saved, then it was made only for the elect. Let the supporters of this system choose which horn of this dilemma they please; either will destroy their doctrine. For as it is absurd to talk about redeeming grace and Gospel provisions, *sufficient* to save those who are eternally and effectually excluded from these blessings, so it is idle to talk about a redemption for *all*, which includes provisions sufficient only to save the *elect*. Not even the fiction of a *natural ability* in all men to serve God and get to heaven, will help this difficulty. For allowing, in the argument, that the reprobates have ability to serve God and gain heaven, without grace, and in spite of God's decree, still, as this is called a *natural ability*, it is plain it is not the fruit of the atonement. It is equally irrelevant to argue that the atonement may be said to

be universal, because it contains enough to save the whole world, if they would or could embrace it, and it is only their excessive depravity which renders it impossible for them to receive the atonement. For this is the same as to say, that a physician has an efficient remedy to heal his patient, only he is so sick he cannot take it. This excessive weakness is that for which the physician should prescribe, and to which the medicine should be applied. And if it does not come to this it is no medicine for this case. So the atonement, if it is not a remedy for man's extreme depravity, it is no provision for him. If it does not give a gracious power to all sinners to embrace salvation, it has accomplished nothing for the depraved reprobate. Since, therefore, according to Calvinism, the atonement provides for the reprobate neither natural nor moral ability to serve God, nor makes it possible for him to be saved, it follows, that the atonement is made only for the elect. But as this is contrary to the word of God, the doctrine that leads to this conclusion must be false.

5. If time would permit, I might here notice at some length several objections to this doctrine: – Such as that it takes away all motives to repentance, by giving the sinner just cause to say, “If I am to be saved, I shall be, do what I may; and if I am to be damned, I must be, do what I can;” – it leads to the idea of infant damnation – it weakens the zeal and paralyzes The efforts of devotion and benevolence – it destroys the end of punishment, the original design of which was to prevent sin, but which, according to this doctrine, was designed merely for the

glory of God; and sin was ordained for the purpose of giving God an opportunity of glorifying himself in punishing it. These and others might be dwelt upon with effect; but passing them all, I hasten to the conclusion of my arguments, by urging only one more objection to the system I am opposing.

6. We are suspicious of this doctrine, because its advocates themselves seem studious to cover up and keep out of sight many of its features, and are constantly changing their manner of stating and defending their system. A little attention to the history of the controversy between predestinarians and their opposers, will show the truth and force of this objection. The charge that Calvinism covers up and keeps out of sight some of its most offensive features, does not lie so much against its advocates of the old school, as those of the modern. With the exception of some logical consequences, which we think chargeable upon the system, and which they were unwilling to allow, these early defenders of unconditional election came out boldly and fearlessly with their doctrine. If modern Calvinists would do the same, we should need no other refutation of the system. But even the early supporters of Calvinism, when pressed by their opponents, resorted to various forms of explanation and modes of proof, and also to various modifications of the system itself. Goodwin, in his work entitled, "Agreement of Brethren," &c, says: – "The question, as to the object of the decrees, has gone out among our Calvinistic brethren into endless digladiations and irreconcilable divisions," and then goes on to

mention nine of these “irreconcilable divisions” that prevailed at his day. At the present day these school subtleties are not so prevalent, but numerous changes of a more popular cast, and such as are suited to cover up the offensive features of the system, are now introduced. The modern defence of this doctrine consists chiefly in the dexterous use of certain ambiguous technicalities which, in this theology, mean one thing, and in common language another. And this is carried to such an extent, that it is now a common thing to hear parishioners contend strenuously that their pastors do not hold to predestination, when it is well known to some, at least, that they do; and that they are exerting themselves to spread the sentiment.

This is a subject, permit me here to say, on which I touch with more reluctance than upon any other point involved in this controversy. To represent the thing as it is, seems so much like accusing our brethren of insincerity and duplicity, that nothing but a regard to truth would induce me to allude to it. Whether this arises from an excessive but honest zeal for their system, or whether it is supposed the cause is so important, and at the same time so difficult to be sustained, that the end will justify what, in other cases, would be judged questionable policy, and hardly reconcilable with the spirit of a guileless Christianity, is certainly not for me to decide. With respect to their motives, they will stand or fall by the judgment of Him that trieth the reins. But the course, at any rate, seems very reprehensible. Take one instance: – All sinners, we are told, may come to Christ

if they will; and therefore they are criminal if they do not. – Now this mode of speech corresponds very well with Scripture and reason. And who, that had not been specially instructed in the dialect of this theology, would understand that this mode of speech, according to Hopkinsian technics, implied an inability and an impossibility of obtaining salvation? And yet this is the fact: for though, according to this system, if we have a will to come to Christ, we *may*, yet by a *Divine constitution* it is as much impossible to have this will as it is to break the decree of Jehovah, – Hence all such modes of speech are worse than unmeaning; they have a deceptive meaning. They mean one thing in this creed, and another thing in popular language. It never occurs to the generality of mankind, when they are told they may do thus and thus, *if they will*, that there is a secret omnipotent influence impelling and controlling the will. They suppose these expressions, therefore, mean that, independent of all irresistible foreign influences, they have, within themselves, the power to choose or not to choose: and yet the real meaning of the speaker differs as much from this, as a negative differs from an affirmative.

In perfect accordance with the foregoing, is the common explanation that is given to the doctrine of election and reprobation. Reprobation is kept out of sight; and yet it is as heartily believed by modern Calvinists, as it was by John Calvin himself. It is taught too; but it is taught covertly. And yet when we quote old-fashioned Calvinism, in its primitive plain dress,

we are told *these are old authors*; we do not believe with them: “if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in *their errors*,” and yet “they are witnesses unto themselves, that they *are the children* of them” who taught these errors. They recommend their writings, they garnish their sepulchres, they teach their catechisms to the rising generation; they say, even in their Church articles of faith, “We believe in the doctrines of grace, as held and taught by the *fathers* and *reformers* in the Church,” – and especially do they hold to that root and foundation of the whole system, “God hath, from all eternity, foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.”

Since I have alluded to Church articles, it will be in support of this objection to say that the written creeds of Churches partake of this same ambiguous character. They are either expressed in texts of Scripture, or in doubtful and obscure terms; so that different constructions can be put upon them, according to the faith of the subscriber. And instances have been known, in which articles of faith have been altered, again and again, to accommodate scrupulous candidates. And yet their candidates for holy orders, and for professorships, in their theological institutions, are required to subscribe to a rigid Calvinistic creed. In this way it is expected, doubtless, that the doctrine will be maintained and perpetuated, though in other respects public opinion should be accommodated. How would honest John Calvin, if he could be introduced among us, with the same sentiments he had when on earth, frown upon the Churches that

bear his name! He would not only call them “silly and childish,” but he would, doubtless, in his bold, blunt manner, charge them with disingenuousness and cowardice, if not with downright duplicity, for thus shunning and smoothing over and covering up the more repulsive features of their system. How would he chide them for shifting their ground, and changing their system, while they nevertheless pretend to build on the same foundation of predestination! He would, we believe, sternly inquire of them what they meant by saying, all sinners, not excepting reprobates, may come to Christ and be saved? – why they pretended to hold to election, and not to reprobation? – how they could reconcile general redemption with particular election? – and especially would he frown indignantly upon that new doctrine, lately preached and defended, in what has been supposed to be the head quarters of orthodoxy in New – England, by which we are taught that derived depravity is not any taint or sinful corruption of our moral constitution, but consists, exclusively and entirely, in *moral exercise*! But probably he would get little satisfaction from those who profess his creed and bear his name. They would tell him that the old forms of this system were so repulsive, the people would not receive them; and that, being hard pressed by their antagonists, they had thrown up these new redoubts, and assumed these new positions, not only to conceal their doctrine, but if possible to defend it. And as he could get little satisfaction of *them*, he would get less from us. – Could we meet the venerable reformer, we would thank him for his

successful zeal and labour in the Protestant cause; but we would expostulate with him for giving sanction and currency to his “horrible decree.” We would tell him he had committed to his followers a system so abhorrent to reason, and so difficult to be supported by Scripture, that they had been *driven* into all these changes in hope of finding some new and safe ground of defence; and that, while we considered this as a striking and convincing argument against the doctrine itself, we viewed it as auspicious of its final overthrow; that these changes, refinements, and concealments, were symptoms that the doctrine was waxing old, and was ready to vanish away.

But I must conclude this discourse. To your serious consideration, Christian brethren, I commend the sentiments contained in it. Whatever you may think of the discourse itself, I cannot fail, I think, of escaping censure. Those who accord with the sentiments here defended, will of course approve; and those who believe in predestination will of course be reconciled to the preaching because God hath decreed it. It hath come to pass that I have preached as I have, and therefore it is a part of the Divine plan. It hath come pass that Arminianism exists, and therefore this is a part of the Divine plan. We beg our brethren who differ from us, not to fight against God’s plan if they say it is right for us to fight against it, because this also is decreed – I answer, This only confirms our objections against the system, for it arrays the Deity against himself. From all such inconsistencies, *may the God of truth deliver us. Amen.*

NUMBER I.

REPLY TO THE

CHRISTIAN SPECTATOR. ³

This sermon had been before the public almost two years before it received any notice, so far as the author is informed, from any of the advocates of predestination. After the third edition was announced, there were several passing acrimonious censures in some of the Calvinistic periodicals, which did not affect the merits of the question at issue between us and the predestinarians. At length the Rev. Mr. Tyler, of this city, (Middletown, Conn.) published a sermon which was evidently written in reference to the sermon on predestination. This sermon of Mr. T. might have been noticed; but its general positions were so indefinite, and its modes of illustration so vague, it seemed hardly calculated to narrow the field of controversy or hasten a decision of the question at issue. For example: Mr. T. defines election to be “the eternal purpose of God to renew, sanctify, and save every man whom he wisely can, and no others.” With such a proposition there certainly can be no controversy, for it leaves the subject more vague, and the point in dispute more confused than before a definition was attempted.

³ The review of the sermon, in the Christian Spectator, is understood to be from the pen of Doctor Fitch, professor of divinity in Yale College.

There are two errors, the antipodes of each other, which, in all controversy, and especially religious controversy, ought to be carefully guarded against. The one is an attempt to make the subjects of difference more numerous and consequential than they are in truth; and the other is an attempt to cover up real differences under indefinite propositions and ambiguous terms. Both these errors may be the result of honest motives: the former may arise from a jealous regard to the truth, and the latter from a love of peace. Both, however, are injurious; for neither does the one promote the cause of truth, nor does the other secure a permanent peace. Indeed, bringing antagonist principles into contact gives an additional impulse to their repellent forces, so that a transient union produces, in the end, greater discord. Though the controversy in the Church, between Calvinists and Arminians, has been long and injurious; yet, as an individual, I never can sign a *union creed* of doubtful terms and ambiguous articles. Nor can I deem it worth my while to contend about such terms and articles. I should fear the searching interrogatory of Him who questioned Job: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" In the present controversy there is danger of this ambiguity also from a less commendable principle than a love of peace, viz. an adherence to old symbols of faith to avoid the imputation of a change; while, at the same time, to escape the force of unanswerable argument, vague propositions, ambiguous definitions, and equivocal terms are made the bulwark of defence. This principle was alluded to in the

sermon on predestination; and although it has given great offence to some of the Calvinists, and is represented by the author of the review which we are about to notice as being “utterly unworthy of the attention of a person who is honestly inquiring after truth;” yet it seems to me he knows little of his own heart who thinks himself incapable of such a course. Nor does it seem *utterly unworthy* of an honest inquirer after truth to mark the effects of arguments upon systems, since the changes effected in those systems, by the arguments urged against them, show the strength of the one and the weakness of the other. If; therefore, I should undertake to answer Mr. Tyler’s sermon, my strictures would consist chiefly in pointing out its indefiniteness and incongruity. But this, without convincing, might give offence. And although I see no way of continuing the controversy, as the Calvinists now manage it, without alluding to this course of the advocates of predestination, yet I am happy to say there is less of it in the “review” before us than is common in modern treatises on that subject. Though it is a laboured article of about forty-three pages, yet it is generally in a manly style, and sustained by a train of close and skilful argumentation. It would afford me great pleasure to be able to equal the reviewer’s ingenuity, and still more to throw into my reply the serenity of his spirit. I have little occasion, however, in the present case, to dread his talents or lose my temper; for if I understand the reviewer, though his essay bears upon it, if not the “rugged,” at least the decided “aspect of controversy” with my sermon, he is nevertheless in principle an Arminian. I allude now

more especially to his views of predestination. On election there is evidently a greater difference between us; and yet it strikes me when a man discards Calvinian predestination, consistency would require that the peculiarities of Calvinian election should be discarded also. At any rate, as the settling of the former question will have a very strong bearing upon the other, I shall confine myself in this article to predestination. I am not certain that I understand the reviewer; but his candour authorizes me to believe that he will explain himself frankly, and correct me if I misunderstand him. If we are agreed on this point we ought to know it, and give over the controversy. If we are not, let us know the precise ground of difference. And in either case we shall be the better prepared to pursue the question of election.

The question in dispute is simply this: What relation is there between the decrees or purposes of God and the responsible acts of man? The Arminian views on this question, as I understand them, are these: God, as a Sovereign, in deciding upon his works, had a right to determine on such a system as pleased him; but, being infinitely wise and good, he would of course choose, in the contemplation of all possible systems, to create such a one as, all things considered, would bring the most glory to himself, and the greatest good to the universe. In infinite wisdom he decided that such a system would be a *moral government*, consisting of himself, as the supreme and rightful Governor, and of intelligent subjects, having full and unrestrained power to obey or disobey the mandates of their Sovereign. He foresaw

that one of the unavoidable incidents of such a government would be the possible existence of moral evil; and, in glancing through the proposed system, he foresaw that moral evil would *certainly* exist, involving innumerable multitudes in its ruinous consequences. He did not approve of the evil; he did not decree that it should exist: but still evil was a remote result of a decree of his: for although he foresaw that *if* he made such free agents, and governed them in the manner proposed, they would certainly sin, yet he determined, notwithstanding this *certainly*, to make these agents and govern them as proposed. He determined, however, that they should be under no necessity of sinning, either by his decree, or by the circumstances in which they should be placed; but if they sinned, it should be their own free choice. As he foresaw they would sin, he also determined upon the plan he would pursue in reference to them as sinners, and arranged, in the counsels of his own infinite mind, the extended concatenation of causes and effects, so as to make the “wrath of man praise him,” and deduce the greatest possible good from the best possible system. Such, it is believed, is Arminianism – such is Methodism – such is the doctrine of the sermon – and such are the dictates of the Bible and of sound philosophy.

The next question is, What is the doctrine of the reviewer? He shall speak for himself. On page 612, of the review, he asks the question, “But in what sense are we to understand the position that he (God) purposes the existence of sin?” He proceeds to answer: “Not necessarily, in the sense of his

preferring its existence in his kingdom to its non-existence, &c. In affirming the doctrine of predestination we affirm no more necessarily than that God, with the knowledge that these beings would sin in despite of the best measures of providence and government he could take, purposed to create them and pursue those measures, not for the sake of their sin, but for the good which he nevertheless saw it was possible to secure in his moral kingdom. This would be a purpose with respect to the existence of sin, a purpose to permit its existence, rather than to have no moral system.” – Again, page 613: “Nothing more (touching free agency) is implied in the purpose spoken of than a certainty *foreseen* of God, that if he creates and upholds that being, and pursues wise and good measures of providence, he (the being) will at a given time, fully choose in a given way.” In page 612 he says, “God confers on them (mankind) in their creation the powers of free agency, and he uses *no influence* in his providence or government to procure their sin.” Page 614, “He (God) most obviously has no will opposed to his law, though with a foresight of their conduct he should purpose to permit their sin, rather than dispense with the existence of a moral kingdom.” But it is useless to multiply quotations. Suffice it to say that the reviewer’s whole ground of defence against the arguments of the sermon, on the question of predestination, is solely this Arminian explanation of the doctrine of predestination. He acknowledges, nay boldly asserts, in a strain “of rugged controversy” with his brethren who may differ from this view of the subject, that there is no

other explanation by which the arguments of the sermon can be avoided – that is, as I understand it, the only way to avoid the arguments against the doctrine of Calvinian predestination is to give it up, and assume the Arminian sentiment on this subject. If the reviewer does not mean this, he will of course explain himself fully, and point out the precise difference between his views and those of the Arminians. If, on this subject, the reviewer is an Arminian, he has too much candor, I trust, not to acknowledge it frankly, and too much moral courage to be afraid of the name. If he is not, the cause of truth and his own consistency of character imperiously demand an explanation. Until this point, therefore, is decided, farther arguments on the merits of the question in which we are supposed to be at issue, are useless.

I am not, however, quite ready to dismiss the review. I stated at the commencement it was difficult to pursue this controversy without alluding to the manner in which it had been conducted on the part of our Calvinistic brethren; but that there was less ground for objection in this article in the Spectator than in most others. There are some things in this article, however, that I cannot justify. I will state them frankly, though I trust in Christian friendship. I cannot approve of the reviewer's use of terms: though, to my understanding, he has evidently given the doctrine of predestination not merely a new *dress*, but a new *character*, yet he more than intimates that it is the old doctrine with only a new method of explanation; and seriously and repeatedly complains of the author of the sermon for "confounding the *fact* of God's

foreordaining the voluntary actions of men with this or any other *solution* of that fact or theory as to the *mode* in which it comes to pass.” And so confident is the reviewer that he still believes in the *fact* of predestination, in the old Calvinistic sense, that in stating his sentiments on this subject he uses the same forms of expression which Calvinists have used, when their meaning was as distant from his as the two poles from each other. He tells us, for instance, that “God determined that the events which take place should take place in the very manner in which they do, and for the very ends.” Now if the writer mean what the words naturally imply, then he believes that, in the case of a finally impenitent sinner, God predetermined that all his sins *should* take place in the manner they did, and for the very end that he might be damned! Again he tells us, “God, in his eternal purpose, has predetermined all events.” And, quoting from the Assembly’s Catechism, “God, from all eternity, did freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass,” he tells us that this expresses essentially the views entertained by the orthodox Congregationalists of New-England, among whom, I suppose of course, he would include himself. Now, after what I have said of the reviewer’s Arminianism, I doubt not but some of my readers will be startled at these quotations, and be ready to accuse me of great credulity in the judgment I have formed of the writer’s sentiments. I shall exculpate myself, however, by saying, in the first place, that if there is any contradiction in the writer’s sentiments or language, it is not my fault, but his; and if

I should attempt to reconcile them, perhaps the reviewer would not thank me for my officiousness. Beside, after what has been said, I feel safer in understanding the reviewer in an *Arminian sense*, because he and some others take it very ill of me that I have represented them as Calvinists. But, in fairness to the reviewer, it is presumed that he will not consider himself justly chargeable with contradiction. He has used these old terms, it is true, and thus has *subscribed* to the Calvinistic creed as positively as the staunchest Calvinist; but then, let it be understood, he has *explained* that creed, and defined the terms, and protests against being held responsible for any other construction than his own. Hence by God's predetermining that sin *should* take place, in the very manner, and for the very ends it does – by God's foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass – he only means that God foresaw that sin would certainly take place, and predetermined that he would not hinder it, either by refraining from creating moral agents, or by throwing a restraint upon them that would destroy their free agency. In short, that he would submit to it as an evil unavoidably incident to the best possible system, after doing all that he wisely could to prevent it! This is *foreordaining sin!!* This is *predetermining* that it *should be!!!* I cannot but express my *deepest regret* that a gentleman of the reviewer's standing and learning should lend his aid and give his sanction to such a perversion of language – to such a confusion of tongues. We do not complain of the doctrine contained in the *explanation*; but we protest, in the name of all that is pure in

language, in the name of all that is important in the sentiments conveyed by language, against such an abuse of terms. Alas for us! When will the watchmen see eye to eye! when will the Church be at peace! while our spiritual guides, our doctors in divinity, pursue this course? By what authority will the reviewer support this definition? Do the words *predestinate*, or *foreordain*, or *decree* mean, in common language, or even in their radical and critical definition, nothing more than *to permit* – *not absolutely to hinder* – *to submit to as an unavoidable but offensive evil*? The reviewer certainly will not pretend this. Much less do they mean this when used in a magisterial or authoritative sense, to express the mind and will of a superior or governor toward an inferior or a subject. – What is the *decree* of a king? What is the *ordinance* of a senate? What is the official determination of a legislative body? Let common sense and common usage answer the question. Not a man probably can be found, from the philosopher to the peasant, who would say these words would bear the explanation of the reviewer. Yet it is in this official and authoritative sense that theologians, and our reviewer among them, use these terms. The Assembly's Catechism, as quoted by himself, says, "God, from all eternity, *did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain,*" &c. Now it would be a gross insult to common sense to say of such language as this, in the mouth of an earthly potentate, that the sovereign meant by this nothing more than that he permitted the existence of certain unavoidable, and in themselves, highly

offensive evils in his kingdom, because he could not remove them without embarrassing the essential operations of his government. There is not, probably, a clearer case in the whole range of philology.

But the use of these terms by those who believe as I understand the reviewer to believe, is the more unjustifiable, because they are used by most Calvinistic authors in a different sense. – Why, then, should the reviewer, believing as he does, continue to use them in the symbols of his faith? Different persons might give different answers to such a question. For one, I would prefer he should answer it himself.

I cannot approve of the reviewer's censures upon my manner of treating the doctrine of predestination. He accuses me of confounding the *doctrine* itself, with *modes* of explanation. He says they are perfectly distinct; and though some may have been unfortunate in their modes of explanation, and though he acknowledges my arguments bear against such, yet the *fact* of the doctrine itself is not thereby affected. His mode of explanation, for example, he thinks untouched by the arguments of the sermon. But his mode of explanation, as we have seen, turns the doctrine into *Arminianism*. And it would, perhaps, be no difficult matter to show, that any explanation of the doctrine, short of doing it away, would be exposed to all the weight of the arguments urged in the sermon. But the sermon was never written to oppose those who hold to the decrees of God in an Arminian sense. Why then does the reviewer complain of the

sermon? Why does he so “deeply regret” that the author of the sermon “should come before the public with an attack on the faith of a *large part* of the Christian community, conducted in a way so obviously erroneous and unjust?” The sermon was against Calvinism, not Arminianism. It is true, the reviewer may say, the sermon alludes, in some parts, to the Calvinism of New-England, and therefore he felt himself implicated. But he certainly was not unless he is a New-England *Calvinist* – unless he believes that “God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass,” in the proper sense of those terms. Indeed, it seems that Calvinism, in its proper character, is as obnoxious to the reviewer, as to the author of the sermon; and the former seems to have taken this opportunity to show the *nakedness* of the system, and bring into notice a better doctrine. If so, is it safe that the reviewer should still accord to them their old symbols of faith? And is it just, that the author of the sermon should be held the defendant on the record, when the execution is issued against Calvinism itself? In answer to the former question, I would say, it is utterly *unsafe*, and never will be approved of, I believe, by Arminians. With respect to the latter question, if it is *safer* to attack Calvinism in this indirect way, I will not object, though it may seem at present to my disadvantage. But I cannot see that it would be safer – an open bold front always ends best. What if it should subject the reviewer, and the theological doctors in New-Haven generally, to the charge of heresy? Still they ought not to shrink from their responsibilities – they occupy a commanding influence among

the Churches and over the candidates of their theological school, and that influence should be openly and decidedly directed to discountenance error. They should remove it, root and branch. Especially should they discard those old symbols of faith, which are not only in themselves, in *their true and proper meaning*, a reflection upon the clerical character, and a *black spot* upon an otherwise orthodox creed, but are also especially obnoxious, because they are the very articles which the great body of the Calvinists have maintained, in a sense widely different from that of the reviewer. At the head of these stands Calvin, the author of the system, in the Protestant Church. Calvin, who says, "I will not scruple to own that the will of God lays a necessity on all things, and that every thing he wills necessarily comes to pass." "Adam fell, not only by the *permission*, but also by the *appointment* of God. He not only *foresaw* that Adam would fall, but also *ordained* that he should." "The devil and wicked men are so held in on every side, with the hand of God, that they cannot conceive or contrive or execute any mischief, any farther than God himself doth not *permit* only, but *command* – nor are they held in fetters, but compelled also, as with a bridle, to perform obedience to those commands." Calvin, it seems, was far from thinking that *appointment* only meant *permission*, or that to *ordain* only meant certainty *foreseen*. In this he was correct: in this he has been followed by a host of writers down to the present day, and copied in numerous ecclesiastical symbols, in different parts of Christendom; and does not the reviewer know

that these terms are understood by Hopkins and Emmons, and all the Calvinists of that school, in a sense widely different from his explanation, and in a sense, too, much more in accordance with the *proper meaning* of the terms? Does he not know that a great majority of the Calvinists of the United States, and perhaps in New-England, even understand these terms, as indeed they ought to be understood, when used in reference to sin, as expressing a preference of sin, in that part of the Divine plan where sin occurs, to holiness in its stead? Indeed, as I understand the reviewer, from the days of John Calvin down to the present hour, there is, on this point, between the great body of Calvinists and himself, almost no likeness, except in the use of words. Theirs is one doctrine – his another. Why, then, does he oppose the opposers of Calvinism, and thus keep error in countenance? Especially, why does he hail from that party, and hoist their signals, and then, alter *seeming* to get the victory, by espousing the very cause of the assailed, encourage the *Calvinists* to triumph, as if *their* cause had been successful? Is this justice to the author of the sermon? Is it the best way to promote truth? But I forbear. The reviewer's subsequent explanations may remove these difficulties. At any rate, the cause of truth will doubtless advance. The appearance of this review has given additional strength to the sentiment, Calvinism "is waxing old, and is ready to vanish away." The dogma that "God has predetermined all events, and elected (in a Calvinistic sense) out of our guilty world all who shall be heirs of salvation," withers at the touch of advancing truth, and is fast

losing credit in the Christian Church.

Since writing the above, I have seen an inquiry of a correspondent in one of the Calvinistic papers, in these words, "Why do our Calvinistic writers retain the words which seem so sadly to perplex our Arminian brethren, when it is certain that we do not attach the signification to them which they always pretend?" and then instances in the word "foreordain." The editor, in reply, gives as a reason for using these words, that they are Scriptural; and seems to deem it necessary that they should *persist* in this use until we submit. This reply of the editor reminded me of a remark of Mr. Tyler, in his sermon already alluded to: "The Calvinist contends that God resolved, from eternity, to permit all the sins and miseries which were to take place; and this he calls, in the language of the Bible, *foreordination*." Now, not to stop here, to show that no true Calvinist would ever call *foreordination* and *permission* the same thing, for Calvin has, as we have seen, clearly distinguished the two words from each other, I beg the privilege of adding a thought or two on this idea of Scripture authority for the use of these terms. For if it is only because the Scriptures use these words in this sense, that they *persist* in using them, I think we may easily settle this question. Let it be shown that the Scriptures use "foreordination," or "predestination," in the sense of mere *permission* – *not absolutely hindering*. Again: let *one passage* be shown in which it is said, God "predestinates" all things, or "foreordains" whatsoever comes to pass. If this cannot be

done, how futile, how more than absurd is it, to talk about using these words, because the Scriptures use them! To use Scripture words out of the Scripture sense, and then appeal to Scripture to sanction this use, is as sad a perversion of the Scriptures as it is of logic. Indeed, to give such a meaning to the word predestinate, is at once to take away the principal scriptures quoted by the reviewer, and others, to prove Calvinistic election. See Eph. i, 5; ii, 10; Rom. viii, 29. Does predestination in these passages mean merely *to permit*, or not *to hinder*? and do these passages teach a personal election to eternal life? Is this all the Calvinists mean by the *election of sovereign grace*, not of man, nor of the will of mans but of God? Alas! for the elect! If man does not elect himself, and God *only predestinates*, that is, *permits* – *does not hinder* his election; who, we ask, will elect him? How does error destroy itself! These gentlemen may take which ground they please; they may either acknowledge that Bible predestination means an *efficient purpose of God* to accomplish an object, and then meet the sermon on the issue there proposed; or they may interpret these words as the reviewer has, and then give up those passages which they consider their strong hold, in favour of Calvinian election. In either case their system must suffer serious loss. Nothing could be more unfortunate, I think, than this appeal to the Bible to sanction such an abuse of terms. As to the word foreordain, I do not recollect that it occurs in our translation. Jude 4, has “before of old ordained,” &c, but it is in the original very different from the word rendered predestinate.

The allusion is to characters that were proscribed for their sins, and designated for deserved punishment. The original for predestinate, proorizo, is used in only one place, so far as I can find, with any direct reference to a sinful act, Acts iv, 28. This passage is quoted by the reviewer. But the determination here spoken of, he himself informs us, relates to “the purpose of God to make an atonement for the sin of the world, by means of the death of Jesus Christ.” Hence the predetermination of God, in this instance, probably refers to the *work* of atonement, without including therein any special decree in respect to the means of the suffering. Christ *could* have suffered, even unto death, in the garden without any human means. But inasmuch as these men had the murderous purpose, God “chose to leave Christ to their power,” &c, therefore *decreed*

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