

Robert L. Dabney

taken from

SYSTEMATIC AND POLEMIC THEOLOGY

[first published in 1878AD]

LECTURE XXII.

PREDESTINATION.—Concluded.

[part 2 of 2]

SYLLABUS.

1. State the doctrine as taught by the Hypothetic Universalists, Amyraut and Camero.

Turretin, Loc. iv, Qu. 17 and 18, §3-20. Watson's Theol. Inst., ch. 28, §1, 2. Richard Baxter's "Universal Redemption."

2. State and refute the Arminian scheme of predestination.

Turretin, Loc. iv, Qu. 10, 11, 12 and 17. Hill, Div., bk. iv, ch. 7, §2 and 3. Dick, Lect. 35. Watson's *ubi supra*.

3. What is God's decree of preterition as to those finally lost? What its ground? How proved? And how does God harden such?

Turretin, Loc. iv, Qu. 14, 15. Hill, as above. Dick, Lect. 36. Wesley's Sermons.

4. Is predestination consistent with God's justice? With His holiness? With His benevolence and sincerity in the offer of mercy to all?

Calvin's Inst., bk. iii, ch. 23. Hill, as above. Dick, Lect. 36. Jno. Howe.

Letter to Ro. Boyle. Turretin, *Fontes Sol.*, Loc. iv, Qu. 17.

5. What should be the mode of preaching and practical effect of the doctrine of predestination on the Christian life?

Turretin, Loc. iv, Qu. 6. Dick, Lect. 36. Conf. of Faith, ch. 3.

SOME French Presbyterian Divines of Saumur about 1630-50 devised still another scheme of relations between the parts of the decree, representing God as first (in order, not in time) purposing to create man; second, to place him under a covenant of works, and to permit his fall; third, to send Christ to provide and offer satisfaction for all, out of His general compassion for all the fallen; but fourth, foreseeing that all would surely reject it because of their total depravity, to select out of the rebellious mass, some, in His sovereign mercy, to whom He would give effectual calling. They supposed that this theory would remove the difficulties concerning the extent of the sacrifice of Christ, and also reconcile the passages of Scripture which declare God's universal compassion for sinners, with His reprobation of the non-elect.

This scheme is free from many of the objections which lie against the Arminian; it holds fast to the truth of original sin, and it avoids the absurdity of conditioning God's decree of election on a foresight of the saints' faith and repentance. But in two respects it is untenable. If the idea of a real succession in time between the parts of the divine decree be relinquished, as it must be, then this scheme is perfectly illusory in representing God as decreeing to send Christ to provide a redemption to be offered to all, on condition of faith, and this out of His general compassion. For if He foresees the certain rejection of all at the time, and at the same time purposes sovereignly to withhold the grace which would work faith in the soul, from some, this scheme of election really makes Christ to be related, in God's purpose, to the non-elect, no more closely nor beneficially than the stricter Calvinistic scheme. But second and chiefly, it represents Christ as not purchasing for His people the grace of effectual calling, by which they are persuaded and enabled to embrace redemption. But God's purpose to confer this is represented as disconnected with Christ and His purchase, and subsequent, in order, to His work, and the foresight of its rejection by sinners. Whereas Scripture represents that this gift, along with all other graces of redemption, is given us in Christ, having been purchased for His people by Him (Eph. i. 3; Phil. i. 29; Heb. xii. 2).

I have postponed to the last, the fourth scheme for arranging the order of the parts of the decree, which is the Arminian. Unwilling to rob God openly of His infinite perfection, as is done by the Socinians, they admit that He has some means of foreseeing the contingent acts of free-agents, although He neither can nor does, consistently with their free-agency, exercise any direct foreordination over those acts. Such contingent acts, they say, would be unknowable to a finite mind, but this does not prove that God may not have some mode of certainly foreknowing them, which implies no foreordination, and which is inscrutable to us. This foresight combines with His eternal purpose in the following order. 1st. God decreed to create man holy and happy and to

place him under a covenant of works. 2nd. God foreseeing man's fall into a state of total depravity and condemnation, decreed to send Jesus Christ to provide redemption for all. (This redemption included the purchase of common, sufficient grace for all sinners.) And God also, in this connection, determined the general principle that faith should be the condition of an actual interest in this redemption. 3rd. Next He foresaw that some would so improve their common grace as to come to Christ, turn from sin and persevere in holiness to the end of life. These He eternally purposed to save. Others, He foresaw, would neglect their privileges, so as to reject, or after embracing, to forsake Christ; and these He eternally purposed to leave in their guilt and ruin. Thus His purpose as to individuals, while eternal, is conditioned wholly on the conduct foreseen in them.

This plausible scheme seems to be, at the first glance, attended with several advantages for reconciling God's goodness and sincerity with the sinner's damnation. But the advantages are only seeming. The scheme is overthrown by all the reasons which showed generally that God's decrees cannot be conditional; and especially by these. (a) That every one of the creature acts is also foreordained, on which a part of the decree is supposed to be conditioned. (b.) That all the future events into which these contingent acts enter, directly or indirectly, as causes, must be also contingent; which would cast a quality of uncertainty and possible failure over God's whole plan of redemption and moral government, and much of His other providence. (c.) And that God would no longer be absolute sovereign; for, instead of the creatures depending on Him alone, He would depend on the creature.

One can scarcely believe that Paul would have answered the objections usually raised against God's sovereign decree, as He does in Rom. ix., had He inculcated this Arminian view of it. In verses 14 and 19, he anticipates those objections; 1st that God would be unjust; 2d that He would destroy man's free agency, and He deigns no other answer than to reaffirm the absolute sovereignty of God in the matter, and to repudiate the objections as sinful cavils. How different this from the answer of the Arminian to these cavils. He always politely evades them by saying that all God's dealings with men are suspended on the improvement they choose to make of His common mercy offered to them. This contrast leads us to believe that St. Paul was not an Arminian.

The believer's faith, penitence, and perseverance in holiness could never be so foreseen by God, as to be the condition moving Him to determine to bestow salvation on him, because no child of Adam ever has any true faith, etc., except as fruits of God's grace bestowed in election. This is evinced in manifold ways throughout Scripture. (a.) Man is too depraved ever to exercise these graces, except as moved thereto by God (Rom. viii. 7; 2 Cor. iii. 5; Rom. vii. 18; Gen. vi. 5). (b.) The elect are declared to be chosen to the enjoyment of these graces, not on account of the exercise of them (Rom. viii. 29; 2 Thess. ii. 13 14; Eph. i. 4; ii. 10). (c.) The very faith, penitence and perseverance in holiness which Arminians represent as conditions moving God to elect man, the Scripture represents as gifts of God's grace inwrought by Him in the elect, as consequences of His election (Eph. ii. 8; Acts v. 31; 2 Tim. ii. 25; Phil. i. 6; 2 Pet. i. 3). (d.) All the elect

believe on Christ (John x. 16, 27 to 29; John vi. 37, 39; xvii. 2, 9, 24), and none others do (John x. 26; Acts xiii. 48; ii. 47). Couple these two facts together, and they furnish a strong evidence that faith is the consequence (therefore not the cause) of election.

The Scriptures in the most express and emphatic terms declare that it was no goodness in the elect which caused God to choose them; that His electing love found them lying in the same mass of corruption and wrath with the reprobate, every way deserving the same fate, and chose them out of it for reasons commending themselves to His own good pleasure, and in sovereign benevolence. This was seen in Jacob and Esau (Rom. ix. 11-13), as to Israel (Ezek. xvi. 3-6). As to all sinners (Rom. ix. 15, 16, 18, 21, viii. 28). (Here the Arminians claim that God's foreknowledge precedes and prompts His foreordination. But we have shown that this foreknowledge implies selection.) 1 Timothy i. 9; Matthew xi. 26; John xv. 16-19.

From the Arminian doctrine of conditional election, must flow this distinction, admitted by many Wesleyans. Those who God foresaw would believe and repent, He thereupon elected to adoption. But all Arminians believe that an adopted believer may "fall from grace." Hence, the smaller number, who God foresaw would persevere in gospel grace, unto death, He thereupon elected to eternal life. And the persons elected to eternal life on foresight of their perseverance, are not identical with those elected to adoption on foresight of their faith. But now, if the former are, in the omniscience of God, elected to eternal life on foresight of their perseverance, then they must be certain to persevere. We have here, therefore, the doctrine of the perseverance of this class of the elect. The inference is unavoidable. On this result we remark first: It is generally conceded by both Calvinists and Arminians, that the doctrine of perseverance is consistent only with that of unconditional election, and refutes the opposite. Second: In every instance of the perseverance of those elected unto eternal life (on certain foresight of their perseverance) we have a case of volitions free and responsible, and yet certainly occurring. But this, the Arminians hold, infringes man's freedom. Third: No effect is without a cause. Hence, there must be some efficient cause for this certain perseverance. Where shall it be sought? In a contingent will? or in efficacious grace? These are the only known sources. It cannot be found in a contingent source; for this is a contradiction. It must then be sought in efficacious grace. But this, if dispensed by omniscience, can be no other than a proof and result of electing grace.

The word reprobate (*αδοκιμος*) is not, so far as I know, applied in the Scriptures to the subject of predestination. Its etymology and usage would suggest the meaning of something rejected upon undergoing a test or trial, and hence, something condemned or rejected. Thus Rom. i. 28, *αδοκιμον νουν*, a mind given over to condemnation and desertion, in consequence of great sin (2 Tim. iii. 8). Sectaries, *αδοκιμοι περι την πιστιν*, finally condemned and given over to apostasy concerning the Christian system. 1 Corinthians ix. 27, "Lest after I have preached to others, I myself should be *αδοκιμος*," rejected at the final test, i.e., Judgment Day. Hence the more general sense of "worthless," Titus i. 16; Hebrews vi. 8.

The application of this word to the negative part of the decree of predestination has doubtless prejudiced our cause. It is calculated to misrepresent and mislead, because it suggests too much the idea of a comparative judicial result. For then, the query arises, if the non-elect and elect have been tested as to their deserts, in the divine mind, how comes it that the elect are acquitted when they are as guilty, and the non-elect condemned when they are no worse? Is not this partiality? But the fact is, that in election, God acted as a sovereign, as well as a judge; and that the elect are not taken because they are less guilty upon trial, but because God had other secret, though sufficient reasons. If the negative part of the decree of predestination then must be spoken of as a decree of reprobation, it must be understood in a modified sense.

The theologians, while admitting the strict unity of God's decree, divide reprobation into two elements, as apprehended by us, preterition and pre-damnation. These Calvinists, were they consistent, would apply a similar analysis to the decree of election, and divide it into a selection and a prejustification. Thus we should have the doctrine of an eternal justification, which they properly reject as erroneous. Hence, the distinction should be consistently dropped in explaining God's negative predestination.

I would rather say, that it consists simply of a sovereign, yet righteous purpose to leave out the non-elect, which preterition was foreseen and intended to result in their final righteous condemnation. The decree of reprobation is then, in its essence, a simple preterition. It is indeed intelligent and intentional in God. He leaves them out of His efficacious plan and purpose of mercy, not out of a general inattention or overlooking of them, but knowingly and sovereignly. Yet objectively this act is only negative, because God does nothing to those thus passed by, to make their case any worse, or to give any additional momentum to their downward course. He leaves them as they are. Yea, incidentally, He does them many kindnesses, extends to multitudes of them the calls of His word, and even the remonstrances of His Spirit, preventing them from becoming as wicked as they would otherwise have been. But the practical or efficacious part of His decree is simply that He will not "make them willing in the day of His power."

When we thus explain it, there is abundant evidence of a decree of preterition. It is inevitably implied in the decree of election, coupled with the fact that all are neither elected nor saved. If salvation is of God; if God is a Being of infinite intelligence, and if He has eternally purposed to save some; then He has *ipso facto* equally purposed from eternity to leave the others in their ruin. And to this agree the Scriptures (Rom. ix. 13, 17, 18, 21 and 22; Matt. xi. 25; Rom. xi. 7; 2 Tim. ii. 20; Jude 4; 1 Pet. ii. 8).

This is a part of God's word which has ever been assailed with the fiercest cavils. It has been represented as picturing a God, who created a number of unfortunate immortals, and endued them with capacities for sinning and suffering, only in order that He might damn them forever; and to this wretched fate they are inexorably shut up, by the iron decree, no matter what penitent efforts or what cries for mercy and escape they may put forth; while the equally or more guilty objects of the divine caprice and favouritism are admitted to a Heaven which they cannot forfeit,

no matter how vilely they behave. There is no wonder that a Wesley should denounce the doctrine thus misrepresented, as worthy only of Satan. There is, indeed, enough in the truth of this subject, to fill every thoughtful mind with solemn awe and holy fear of that God, who holds the issues of our redemption in His sovereign hand. But how differently does His dealing appear, when we remember that He created all His creatures at first in holiness and happiness; that He gave them an adequate opportunity to stand; that He has done nothing to make the case of the non-elect worse than their own choice makes it, but on the contrary, sincerely and mercifully warns them by conscience and His word against that wicked choice; that it is all a monstrous dream to fancy one of these non-elect seeking Heaven by true penitence, and excluded by the inexorable decree, because they all surely yet voluntarily prefer their impenitence, so that God is but leaving them to their preferred ways; and that the only way He ensures the elect from the destruction due their sins, is by ensuring their repentance, faith, and diligent strivings to the end in a holy life.

Yet it must be confessed that some of the odiousness of the doctrine is in part due to the unwise views of it presented by the Orthodox sometimes, going beyond all that God's majesty, sovereignty and word require, out of a love of hypothesis. Thus, it is disputed what is the ground of this righteous preterition of the non-elect. The honest reader of his Bible would suppose that it was, of course, their guilt and wickedness foreseen by God, and, for wise reasons, permissively decreed by Him. This, we saw, all but the supralapsarian admitted in substance. God's election is everywhere represented in Scripture, as an act of mercy, and His preterition as an act of righteous anger against sin. The elect are vessels of mercy, the non-elect, of wrath. (God does not show anger at anything but sin) as in Romans ix. 22. Everywhere it is sin which excludes from His favour, and sin alone.

But it is urged, with an affected over-refinement, the sin of the non-elect cannot be the ground of God's preterition, because all Adam's seed being viewed as equally depraved, had this been the ground, all would have been passed by. I reply, yes; if this had been the only consideration, pro or con, present in God's mind. The ill-desert of all was in itself a sufficient ground for God to pass by all. But when His sovereign wisdom suggested some reason, unconnected with the relative desert or ill-desert of sinners, which was a good and sufficient ground for God's choosing a part; this only left the same original ground, ill-desert, operating on His mind as to the remainder. It is perfectly true that God's sovereignty concerns itself with the preterition as well as the election; for the separate reason which grounded the latter is sovereign. But with what propriety can it be said that this secret sovereign reason is the ground of his preterition, when the very point of the case was that it was a reason which did not apply to the non-elect, but only to the elect? As to the elect, it overruled the ground for their preterition, which would otherwise have been found, in their common ill-desert. As to the non-elect, it did not apply, and thus left the original ground, their ill-deserts, in full force. If all sinning men had been subjects of a decree of preterition, nobody would have questioned, but that God's ground for passing them by was simply their ill-desert. Now, then, if a secret, sovereign motive, counterpoising that presented by

the ill-desert, led to the election of some, how does this alter the ground for God's preterition of the rest? Three traitors are justly condemned to death for capital crimes confessed. The king ascertains that two of them are sons of a noble citizen, who had died for the commonwealth; and the supreme judge is moved by this consideration to spare the lives of these men. For what is the third criminal hung? No one has any doubt in answering: "For his treason." The original cause of death remains in operation against him, because no contravening fact existed in his case.

But it is said again: that if we make the sin of the non-elect the ground of their rejection, then by parity of reasoning, we must make the foreseen piety of the elect the ground of their election; and thus return to the error of conditional decrees. This perversely overlooks the fact, that, while the elect have no piety of their own originating to be foreseen, the others have an impiety of their own. Reviewing the arguments against conditional election, the student will see that this is the key to all: It cannot be, because no men will have any piety to foresee, save as it is the result of God's grace bestowed from election. But is it so with men's sin? Just the opposite. Sin is the very condition in which God foresees all men as standing, for all except supralapsarians admit that God in predestination regards man as fallen. Man's foreseen sin may be the ground of God's preterition, because it is not the effect of that preterition, but of another part of His eternal purpose, viz: that to permit the fall. And, as again and again taught, while the decree is absolute, the results decreed are conditioned; and we cannot but conceive God as predicating one part of His eternal purpose on a state of facts which was destined to proceed out of another part thereof.

Again: it is said, Scriptures teach, that the sin of the non-elect was not the ground of their preterition. "In John x. 26, continued unbelief is the consequence, and therefore not the ground of the Pharisees preterition" (Matt. xi. 25; Rom. ix. 11 18). "God's will," they say, "and not the non-sin, is the ground of His purpose to harden." And "Esau was rejected as much without regard to his evil, as Jacob was elected without regard to his good deeds." To the first of these points I reply, that the withholding of God's grace is but the negative occasion of a sinner's unbelief, just as the absence of the physician from a sick man is the occasion, and not the cause, of His death. Men say that "he died because he failed to receive medical help," when speaking popularly. But they know that the disease, and not the physician, killed him. So, our Saviour teaches, in John x. 26; that the stubborn unbelief of the Pharisees was occasioned by God's refraining from the bestowal of renewing grace. But He does not deny that that this unbelief was caused by their own depravity, as left uninfluenced by the Spirit. Turretin (Loc. 4: Qu. 15.) although inconsistently asserting on this point the supralapsarian extreme, says, (Sec. 3,) that we must distinguish between the non-elect man's original unbelief, and his acquired: and that it is the latter only, which he denies to be a ground of preterition, because it is a result thereof. He admits that the original unbelief may be a ground of preterition. This virtually concedes the point. To the second argument, we reply, that God's decree of preterition is, like all others, guided by His *εὐδοκία*. But is this sovereign good pleasure motiveless? Is it irrational caprice? Surely not. It is the purpose of a sovereign; but of one who is as rational, just, holy and good, as He is absolute. Such a being would not pass by in righteous displeasure, His creature in whom He saw

no desert of displeasure. The third point is made from the oft-cited case of the twins, Esau and Jacob. Let the supralapsarian strain the passage to mean that Esau's preterition was no more grounded in his ill-desert, than Jacob's election in his merit, because "the children had not done good nor evil;" and he will only reach a result obnoxious to his own view as to mine. He will make the Apostle teach that these children had no original sin, and that they stood before the divine prescience in that impossible state of moral neutrality, of which Pelagians prate. We are shut up to interpret the passage, just as Turretin does elsewhere, that it is only a relative guilt and innocence between Esau and Jacob, which the Apostle asserts. In fact, both "were by nature children of wrath, even as others."

When it is said that God hardens the non-elect, it is not, and cannot be intended, that He exerts positive influence upon them to make them worse. The proof of this was given under the question, whether God can be the author of sin. See especially James i. 13. God is only the negative cause of hardening—the positive depravation comes only from the sinner's own voluntary feelings and acts. And the mode in which God gives place to, or permits this self-inflicted work, is by righteously withholding His restraining word and Spirit; and second, by surrounding the sinner (through His permissive providence) with such occasions and opportunities as the guilty man's perverse heart will voluntarily abuse to increase his guilt and obduracy. This dealing, though wrong in men, is righteous in God. Even when God's decree and providence concerning sins are thus explained, our opponents cavil at the facts. They say that the rule of holiness enjoined on us is, not only to do no sin, but to prevent all the sin in others we righteously can. They say that the same rule obliges God. They say we represent Him as like a man who, witnessing the perpetration of a crime, and having both the right and power to prevent it, stands idly by: and they refer us to such Scriptures as Proverbs xxiv. 11, 12. And when we remind them, that God permissively ordains those sins, not for the sake of their evil, but for the sake of the excellent and holy ends He will bring out, they retort, that we represent Him as "doing evil that good may come." These objections derive all their plausibility from forgetting that we are creatures and bondsmen of God, while He is supreme judge. The judicial retribution of sin is not our function: He claims it as His own (Rom. xii. 19). It is a recognized principle of His rule to make permitted sins the punishment of sins. Hence, we deny that it follows, the same rules oblige Him, which bind us. It does not follow, that the sovereign proprietor can righteously deal towards His possessions, only in the modes in which fellow servants can properly treat each other. Hence such dealing, making guilty souls the executors, in part, of their own righteous punishment, as would be an intrusion for us, is righteous and holy for Him.

To notice briefly the standing objections: The doctrine of predestination as we have defined it, is not inconsistent with the justice and impartiality of God. His agency in the fall of angels and men was only permissive—the act and choice were theirs. They having broken God's laws and depraved themselves, it would have been just in God to leave them all under condemnation. How then can it be more than just when He punishes only a part? The charge of partiality has been absurdly brought here, as though there could be partiality where there are no rights at all, in any

creature, on the mercy of God; and Acts x. 34; Leviticus xix. 15; Deuteronomy i. 17; 2 Samuel xiv. 14; Romans ii. 11 have been quoted against us. As Calvin very acutely remarks on the first of these, one's *persona*, *προσωπον*, in the sense of these passages, means, not the moral character, as judicially well or ill-deserving, but his accidental position in society, as Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, plebeian or nobleman. And in this sense it is literally true of election, that in it God respects no man's *persona*, but takes him irrespective of all these factitious advantages and disadvantages. To this foolish charge, Matthew xx. 15, is a sufficient answer. God's sovereignty ought undoubtedly to come in as a reply. Within the bounds of His other perfections of righteousness, truth and benevolence, God is entitled to make what disposal of His own He is pleased, and men are His property-Romans ix. 20, 21. Paul does not imply here that God is capable of doing injustice to an innocent creature, in order to illustrate His sovereignty; but that in such a case as this of predestination, where the condemnation of all would have been no more than they deserved, He can exercise His sovereignty, in sparing and punishing just such as He pleases, without a particle of injustice.

2. It is objected, that God's holiness would forbid such a predestination. How, it is said, can it be compatible with the fact that God hates sin, for Him to construct an arrangement, He having full power to effectuate a different one, by which He voluntarily and intentionally leaves multitudes of His creatures in increasing and everlasting wickedness? And the same objection is raised against it from His benevolence. The answer is, that this is but the same difficulty presented by the origin of evil; and it presses on the Calvinist with no more force than on the Arminian, or even on the Socinian. Allow to God a universal, perfect foreknowledge, as the Arminian does, and the very same difficulty is presented, how an almighty God should have knowingly adopted a system for the universe, which would embody such results. For even if the grossest Pelagian view be adopted, that God is literally unable certainly to prevent the wicked acts of man's free will, and yet leave him a free agent, it would doubtless have been in His power to let alone creating those who, He foresaw, would make a miserable immortality for themselves, in spite of His grace. The Arminian is obliged to say: "There are doubtless inscrutable reasons, unknown to us, but seen by God to be sufficient, why He should permit it?" The same appeal to our ignorance is just as available for the Calvinist. And if the lowest Socinian ground is taken, which denies to God a universal foreknowledge of the volitions of free agents, still we must suppose one of two things. He must either have less wisdom than many of His creatures, or else, He made these men and angels, knowing in the general, that large immortal misery would result. So that there is no evasion of this difficulty, except by so robbing God of His perfections as practically to dethrone Him. It is not Calvinism which creates it; but the simple existence of sin and misery, destined never to be wholly in the government of an almighty and omniscient God. He who thinks he can master it by his theory, only displays his folly.

3. It is objected that God's goodness and sincerity in the offer of the Gospel to all is inconsistent with predestination. It is urged: God says He "hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth;" that He would have all men to be saved; and that Christ declared His wish to save reprobate

Jerusalem. Now, how can these things, and His universal offer: “Whosoever will, let him come,” consist with the fixed determination that the non-elect shall never be saved? I reply, that this difficulty (which cannot be wholly solved) is not generated by predestination, but lies equally against any other theory which leaves God His divine attributes. Let one take this set of facts. Here is a company of sinners; God could convert all by the same powers by which He converts one. He offers His salvation to all, and assures them of His general benevolence. He knows perfectly that some will neglect the offer; and yet, so knowing, He intentionally refrains from exerting those powers, to overrule their reluctance, which He is able to exert if He chose. This is but a statement of stubborn facts; it cannot be evaded without impugning the omniscience, or omnipotence of God, or both. Yet, see if the whole difficulty is not involved in it. Every evangelical Christian, therefore, is just as much interested in seeking the solution of this difficulty as the Calvinist. And it is to be sought in the following brief suggestions. God’s concern in the transgression and impenitence of those whom He suffers to neglect His warnings and invitations, is only permissive. He merely leaves men to their own sinful choice. His invitations are always impliedly, or explicitly, conditional; suspended on the sinner’s turning. He has never said that He desires the salvation of a sinner as impenitent; He only says, if the sinner will turn, he is welcome to salvation. And this is always literally true; were it in the line of possibilities that one non-elect should turn, he would find it true in his case. All, therefore, that we have to reconcile is these three facts; that God should see a reason why it is not proper, in certain cases, to put forth His almighty grace to overcome a sinner’s reluctance; and yet that He should be able to do it if He chose; and yet should be benevolent and pitiful towards all His creatures. Now God says in His Word that He does compassionate lost sinners. He says that He could save if He pleased. His word and providence both show us that some are permitted to be lost. In a wise and good man, we can easily understand how a power to pardon, a sincere compassion for a guilty criminal, and yet a fixed purpose to punish, could coexist; the power and compassion being overruled by His wisdom. Why may not something analogous take place in God, according to His immutable nature? Is it said: such an explanation implies a struggle in the breast between competing considerations, inconsistent with God’s calm blessedness? I reply, God’s revelations of His wrath, love, pity, repentance, etc., are all anthropopathic, and the difficulty is no greater here, than in all these cases. Or is it said, that there can be nothing except a lack of will, or a lack of power to make the sinner both holy and happy? I answer: it is exceeding presumption to suppose that, because we do not see such a cause, none can be known to God!

“The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care.” In preaching it, that proportion should be observed, which obtains in the Bible; and no polemical zeal against the impugnors of the doctrine ought to tempt the minister to obtrude it more often. To press it prominently on anxious inquirers, or on those already confused by cavils of heretics or Satanic suggestions, or to urge it upon one inclined to scepticism, or one devoid of sufficient Christian knowledge, experience and humility, is unsuitable and imprudent. And when

taught, it should be in the mode which usually prevails in Scripture, viz: *a posteriori*, as inferred from its result, effectual calling.

But when thus taught, the doctrine of predestination is full of edification. It gives ground for humility, because it leaves man no ground for claiming any of the credit of either originating or carrying on his salvation. It lays a foundation for confident hope; because it shows that “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” It should open the fountains of love and gratitude, because it shows the undeserved and eternal love of God for the undeserving. See here an eloquent passage in Witsius, b. 3, chap. 4, 30. We should learn to teach and to view the doctrine, not from an exclusive, but from an inclusive point of view. It is sin which shuts out from the favour of God, and which ruins. It is God’s decree which calls back, and repairs and saves all who are saved. Whatever of sin, of guilt, of misery, of despair the universe exhibits, arises wholly out of man’s and Satan’s transgression. Whatever of redemption, of hope, of comfort, of holiness and of bliss alleviates this sad panorama, all this proceeds from the decree of God. The decree is the fountain of universal benevolence; voluntary sin is the fountain of woe. Shall the fountain of mercy be maligned because, although it emits all the happiness in the universe, it has a limit to its streams?