

GOD'S EXECUTION OF HIS WILL  
CONCERNING GOOD AND EVIL  
DEEDS  
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**Section I. Preliminary Remarks**

Much has been written in favor of and against the doctrine of the absolute predestination of all things. Of the many arguments against this doctrine is if true it would make God the author of sin. To those taking this position it is inconceivable that any other conclusion could be drawn. If God has preordained all persons, things, and events that were, are, and ever shall be, since sin does exist, it must be concluded that God is the cause of sin. So goes the argument. They believe the fact God is absolutely holy makes it beyond belief that God's Will has anything at all to do with sin.

**The Early Baptists Creeds**

There is limited value in examining Articles of Faith. They can never replace the Bible. Yet, I think it shows an arrogant side when believers today think they have such a hold on the faith so that they can readily dismiss how past spiritual brethren interpreted scripture and how their interpretations led them to the doctrinal positions they held. With this in mind let's examine parts of three early Baptist Confessions that dealt with God's Sovereign Decrees.

The first is the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1644. The first sentence of the third chapter states: "That God hath decreed in himself from everlasting touching all things, effectually to work and dispose them according to the counsel of his own will, to the glory of his Name; in which decree appeareth his wisdom, constancy, truth, and faithfulness; Wisdom is that whereby he contrives all things; Constancy is that whereby the decree of God remains

always immutable; Truth is that whereby he declares that alone which he hath decreed, and though his sayings may seem to sound sometimes another thing, yet the sense of them doth always agree with the decree; Faithfulness is that whereby he effects that he hath decreed, as he hath decreed.”

The second is the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1646. The first half of the third chapter states: “God had decreed in Himself, before the world was, concerning all things, whether necessary, accidental or voluntary, with all the circumstances of them, to work, dispose, and bring about all things according to the counsel of His own will, to His glory: (Yet without being the {chargeable} author of sin, or having fellowship with any therein) in which appears His wisdom in deposing all things, unchangeableness, power, and faithfulness in accomplishing His decree...”.

The third is the London Confession of Faith of 1689. Chapter 3, section 1 was taken from the Westminster Confession. It states: “God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appear his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree.” It should be noted in 1742 the Baptist brethren of the Philadelphia Association adopted the same language.

Whether you agree or not with these creedal statements it should be plain our early Baptists brethren held to the doctrine of the predestination of all things while also holding God was not the author of sin. They held God’s decrees embraced but did not force men to actions that were not according to their own wills and they held the view that there were second causes. These confessions were general in the sense they did not provide complete explanations how second causes or human will were carried out in God’s execution of His eternal counsel nor did they try to explain how God foreordained all things and yet was not to be considered the author of sin.

The brethren responsible for these Articles of Faith also cited passages they believed supported their views. It is interesting to note they used texts to support the doctrine of predestination that many today will understand in a more limited sense. I will reference a few of the texts these earlier Baptists used: Numbers 23.19-20, Psalm 115.3, Psalm 135.6, Proverbs 16.33, Isaiah

45.7, Isaiah 46.10, Jeremiah 14.22, Matthew 6.28 & 30, Matthew 10.29-30, John 19.11, Acts 4.27-28, Romans 11.33-36, Ephesians 1.11, and Colossians 1.16-17. They also cited a couple of texts to prove God was not the author of sin: James 1.13 and I John 1.5.

## **An Experiment**

As the Articles of Faith made no attempt to explain how God preordained everything, including sin without being its author that task was left to the early Baptists writers. These writers found different ways to express themselves but it is plain from their writings they taught God executed His Will differently with regard to evil than He did with regard to good.

Before I take up the task of dealing with this issue I would like for the reader to participate in a simple experiment. Take a quarter in your hand. With the back of your hand facing up open your hand so that the coin falls to the floor. Now, leave it on the floor until I tell you otherwise. I want to talk to you first about what has already happened. Tell me, did you cause the coin to fall? You might reply that you did since you let it go and such a response seems reasonable enough. But let me ask the question in another way. Did you force the coin to fall? To this you would clearly see you did not force it to fall. It fell by its own weight. Now we are ready for you to deal with the fallen coin so pick it up.

The principles of this experiment may not answer every question how a Sovereign God brings evil and good deeds into the world but it should go a long way toward resolving many of them.

## **Section II. Evil Deeds**

I submit God is neither the author of sin nor does He force His creatures to commit sin.

## **God's Permissive Will**

What was first demonstrated by the experiment was that by letting the coin go you permitted it to fall. From this let me introduce the concept of God's

permissive will. Hear me out on this. I know a lot of folk who believe in the absolute doctrine do not like this term. I also know Arminians and Conditionalists readily adopt this term when speaking about God's Will. Therefore, I must make sure I am not misunderstood when I speak of it. I do not believe the term means a whole variety of things can happen. For example, it does not mean lightning during a storm may strike your front yard tree or maybe it will be your back yard tree, or maybe instead it will be your neighbor's tree, or again, maybe there will be no lightning strikes near your home at all. For another example, it does not mean God leaves it up to you whether or not you will sin. Maybe you will or maybe you won't. I do not understand permissive will to mean what most people think when they use the term. They think of it as open-ended; that is, that by God's permission a whole host of things might occur. Contrary to this view I believe God's Will is specific to what He permits. God's purposes include all things but His methods in bringing many of them to pass is through what He has specifically intended to permit and what He intended to permit will happen.

It should be observed the coin did not fall by accident. In order for you to participate in the experiment you both intended and permitted the quarter to fall to the floor. You knew if you opened your hand it would fall. You did not force it to fall. But this brings up another point. The nature of the coin had to be as it was in order to fall. Suppose you had released a balloon recently filled with helium. Rather than falling the balloon would have actually started going upward. Thus, the result of your release would have been different had the object been a helium filled balloon rather than a coin.

In all of this we see how it can be that God's Will encompasses sin while at the same time He remains apart from it.

By examining yourself and by looking at the world around you it should be sufficient to confirm to you the biblical truth that all humanity has fallen into sin. Paul wrote "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5.12). By referring to Old Testament passages the same apostle concluded there was no one righteous, there was none that understood or sought after God, and that every one went astray and became unprofitable. Their throats were compared to open sepulchres, their talk was deceitful, and full of cursing and bitterness. They readily shed blood, and along the way they found destruction and misery. Peace was far from them. Finally they had no fear

of God (Romans 3.11-18). It is human nature to live in such depravity. Jeremiah taught, “the heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17.9), and Jesus taught, “out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies (Matthew 15.19). Paul described the sinner’s condition as being “dead in trespasses and sins” and further described what he meant when he told the Ephesians: “wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2.1-3). Isaiah 64.6 states even what men claim to be righteousness is actually comparable to “filthy rags.”

When you consider all these texts is there anyone who could reasonably think God needs to force men to sin? All that is required for men to transgress is for God to leave them to pursue their own natural course. So, Solomon concluded, “God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecclesiastes 7.29). When God permits a man to fulfill his own desires he will commit iniquity, and the more rope the Lord gives him to follow his own path the further into sin he will go. The Lord declared it was this way with Israel in the wilderness: “So **I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust**: and they walked in their own counsels” (Psalm 81.12). Stephen preached to the Jews about their forefathers saying: “Then God turned, and **gave them up** to worship the host of heaven” (Acts 7.42). Paul traced the continuing decadence of the nations: “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore **God also gave them up** to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves; Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause **God gave them up** into vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in *their*

knowledge, **God gave them over** to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” {that is not lawful} “Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them” (Roman 1.21-32). Even the saints are not fully kept from sinning for John wrote, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (I John 1.8).

So we see that God does not have to force the sinner to transgress. All He has to do is allow him to follow his own hearts’ desire and to the extent He does he will sin to that degree. This is what I mean by permissive will. As the quarter fell from your hand due to its weight so men, when permitted to do so, will fall by virtue of the weight of their own sinful nature.

I have presented to the reader in its simplicity the principle of God’s permissive will as it relates to sin. However, the truth is, this matter is more complex than any human mind can fully comprehend. The question can be raised, if God gives a man up to his own iniquity how is it certain he will commit only the specific sins? Might he not tell lies but not steal or might he commit adultery but not murder? Might he rob a bank without hurting anyone or might he in the commission of this robbery also kill someone? How is it that when men are left to practice wickedness they do some things but not others? In response, I can delve no further into the mysteries of God’s sovereignty than to look at the principle established in Psalm 76:10: “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” That is, when a man shows his wrath it will still end in God’s praise and his wrath will go no further than where God permits it to go. We have an example of this truth in the case of Jacob’s sons. When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father loved him more than he did them they “hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him” (Genesis 37.4). When Joseph reported a dream he had to his brethren wherein their sheaves made obeisance to his sheaf “they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words” (Genesis 37.8). Yet, they were not permitted to act upon their hatred as long as Joseph remained under their father’s watch. However, this protection ended when Jacob sent Joseph to see about his brothers who had gone a distance away to feed the flocks. When they saw Joseph coming

these brothers now had the opportunity to act upon their hatred. They first “conspired against him to slay him.” They said: “Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him” (Genesis 37.18 & 20). But Reuben, upon hearing what the others purposed to do, suggested another plan. He said: “Let us not kill him. And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit that *is* in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again” (Genesis 37.21-22). This course was adopted and Joseph was cast into the pit. Although his life was now spared, Joseph was not to be returned to his father for while he was yet in the pit another opportunity was available to the brothers. As they were eating a band of Ishmeelites came upon them and “Judah said unto his brethren, What profit *is it* if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh. And his brethren were content” (Genesis 37.26-27). They followed Judah’s suggestion and sold him into slavery for twenty pieces of silver. By what is reported in this chapter we see the beginning of Joseph’s journey into Egypt where he went from bondage to a deliverer of people, including his own kin, during days of harsh famine. Does not this account describe how these brothers’ wrath was turned to praise God while at the same time He controlled their wrath in order to keep Joseph alive?

We may never be able to understand how God uses sinful creatures to fulfill all His counsel but we do have enough in this one account to get a small glimpse into how God can use even sin to bring to pass His Sovereign Will.

### **God’s Restraining Will**

When you participated in the experiment it was pointed out that you could reasonably say that you caused the quarter to fall by letting it go. Had you not let go the coin would have been prevented from falling. So, there is a flip side to all of this. If God restrains the remainder of man’s wrath as Psalm 76.10 states and as was illustrated in the case of Jacob’s sons we see He also has a restraining will. He not only permits the evil passions of men to be manifest but He also restrains them so they either do not fully develop or else they are prevented altogether. So, when Abimelech, the king of Gerar, not realizing that Sarah was Abraham’s wife, took her, God intervened and warned the king in a dream that he had taken a man’s wife whereupon Abimelech reasoned with the Lord that he had not known she

was Abraham's wife. God then replied He knew he did not purposefully transgress and told him: "for I also **withheld thee from sinning** against me: therefore **suffered I thee not to touch her**" (Genesis 20.6). Likewise, God restrained David doing what he was ready to do; that is, taking innocent lives in anger when he was told Nabal had insulted his servants and refused to give them provisions at the time David was fleeing from Saul. Nabal's wife went before David and pleaded with him not to destroy innocent men due to her husband's wrongdoing. What she did led David to see that his own hasty plans were wrong and he told her: "Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice, and blessed *be* thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to *shed* blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. For in very deed, *as* the LORD God of Israel liveth, which **hath kept me back from hurting thee**, except thou hastened and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall" {*pisseth against the wall* is an Hebrew expression that refers to a human male} (I Samuel 25.32-34).

By telling Pilate: "Thou **couldst have no power** *at all* against me, except it were given thee from above" (John 19.11) we see again that God's sovereign power restrained the wickedness of men against His Christ until the time He was pleased to have Him bruised (Isaiah 53.10), for before that time Herod had tried but was prevented in having the infant Jesus killed, the Jews at Nazareth were prevented from having Him cast from the edge of a hill (Luke 4.29-30), and the Jews at Jerusalem were also prevented from taking Him "because his hour was not yet come" (John 7.30).

It is also shown many times over that God uses His word to limit or to prevent men from the fullness of their evil impulses. How true is prophecy concerning His word: "it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55.11). Even wicked Ahab was brought to an humble condition by the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah (I Kings 21.27-29), and the word of the Lord spoken by Jonah, and that reluctantly, brought the people of Nineveh to repentance and spared that generation from destruction. And how many souls have been turned from sin through the Lord calling men to preach His gospel! To such an end the Lord sent Paul to both Jews and Gentiles, "To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by



faith that is in me” (Acts 26.18). Look at Onesimus, Philemon’s once unprofitable and wayward slave, who through the apostle’s ministry was then to be received again by Philemon as a profitable servant and brother in Christ. Further, there were times when God even held back the sins of unbelievers against His ministers, as was the case at Corinth when Paul was told “no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18.10).

So, by looking at both sides of God’s Sovereign Will we see there are times when by His permissive will men sin and by His preventive will men’s sins are held in check. However, whether by permitting sin or by restraining it God demonstrates His absolute control over it.

### **The Origins Of Sin**

If you stayed with me concerning what I wrote about permissive will I ask that you continue with me when I say that sin is not included in those things that God brought into existence during the six days of creation. I say this because in its primary sense sin is a verb, not a noun. Sin is what created beings do. I realize that our dictionaries rightly define sin as both a verb and a noun but it is only a noun in its secondary sense; that is, when we talk about it. Let me illustrate. A car crashes into a tree. I used *crashes* as a verb. The driver did something. He crashed. However, a witness was at hand to report to a policeman what he saw. When he described what happened he spoke of it as a noun. He saw *the crash*. The same is true with sin. When confronted with what all David did involving his affair with Bathsheba David confessed, “**I have sinned** against the LORD” (II Samuel 12.13). The term is here used as a verb. However, before the Lord sent Nathan to speak to David we find these words: “**The thing** that David had done displeased the LORD” (II Samuel 11.27). All that David “had done” (a verb) is described as *a thing* (a noun).

Let me use this principle to illustrate further the fact sin in its origins came not from God but rather from created beings. Here is what Jesus said concerning the devil: “He was a murderer from the beginning, and **abode not in the truth**, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and **the father of it**” (John 8.44). From these words we understand Satan fell from the original state of his creation and that it was from him that murder and lying came. Likewise, Peter wrote about “the angels that sinned,” (II Peter 2.4) to which Jude 6

added they “**kept not their first estate**, but left their own habitation.” Paul wrote it was by Adam (the one man) that “**sin entered into the world**, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5.12). So, in these verses you see the original source of sin. It originated at a point in time from created beings. The created Devil first sinned. Some created angels sinned. Adam sinned as well. Then the dam broke. All of Adam’s posterity sinned.

After Solomon made a study of sin he rightly concluded, “that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecclesiastes 7.25 & 29). I cannot imagine what it must have been like to live as our first parents must have lived before they sinned. Although they were natural creatures the fact they had “borne the image of the earthy” (I Corinthians 15.49) surely did not imply the same thing in them at that time as it does in us today. After all they had also been created in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1.26-27) and as long as they were sinless that image remained untarnished. I can only reason they must have had the purest thoughts of and fellowship with their Creator. Unlike us today, they would not have carried the weight of sin in their fleshly members. They also were not mortal creatures in the sense there was no expectation they could die as long as they remained as they were. Yet, they did sin. Eve was deceived by the serpent to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Adam, not deceived, also ate of its fruit (Genesis 3.1-6 & I Timothy 2.14). By this they failed to keep the one commandment that God had given them to sustain them forever in that present state. Now, if Adam transgressed while without a sinful nature, how much more can we reason that sin prevailed in him and all his posterity after his sin? He and Eve became as we are today.

There is nothing in the sacred record that indicates God forced the devil, the fallen angels, or our first parents to transgress. Yet, it is clear that even when they were without sin they were still subject to transgress and that God did not prevent them from doing so. Further, we can also conclude God had a purpose in them doing as they did. Here is what the scripture says: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: **for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die**” (Genesis 2.16-17). Mark what the text says, “for in the day that thou eatest thereof.” It does not leave the matter in doubt whether or not he would break the commandment but it declares plainly that he would and

then surely die (or as the Hebrew should actually be translated here “dying thou shalt die”). So there is an indication of a two-fold death: a death in sin in the day he sinned that led to a corporal death later. Someone may argue that God simply foresaw it happening and well He did but can we not equally argue that there is a determinism built within God’s knowledge of an event for if He foresaw it happening it must by necessity come to pass. And by the same token, since Christ was set forth before the world was made to shed His blood for sinners (I Peter 1.18-19 & Revelation 5.6 & 9), and since some people were chosen to be the beneficiaries of God’s grace through Christ (Ephesians 1.3-7 & II Timothy 1.9-10) it must be clear God had purposed to provide a Redeemer even before any created being committed sin. We have already demonstrated by scripture that God both permits as well as prevents men from doing as they would so why should we not count it reasonable that God had a purpose in not preventing these creatures from doing what in fact they did? And when we examine the scripture: “The LORD hath made all *things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Proverbs 16.4) we should conclude He had a purpose in making all things, even wicked men. Yet, we do not have to conclude He forced them to be wicked but rather we can conclude He had a purpose in letting them become as they were. By drawing this conclusion we can hold without inconsistency the words of James: “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1.13). He is not the author of sin.

### **Examples Of God’s Purposes Being Fulfilled Through Men’s Sinful Actions**

Able men from earlier generations have written excellent articles both teaching and defending the doctrine that God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1.11). It would only be duplicating their writings if I tried to do as they, but there is no reason for me to even attempt to write an exhaustive piece on this subject. After all, I am primarily limiting my remarks to how God brings to pass His Sovereign Will as it pertains to good and evil deeds. To that end I will cite a few scriptures that illustrate the fact He accomplishes His purposes, not by forcing men to sin, but by permitting them to act within their own sinful nature.

First, let’s return to the evil Joseph’s brothers inflicted upon him. When he learned they were afraid he might retaliate against them for what they had done he told them not to fear and then he said: “But as for you, **ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good**, to bring to pass, as *it is* this

day, to save much people alive” (Genesis 50.20). Can it be any clearer that God intended Jacob’s sons to do what they did to Joseph? Yet, He was motivated by good intentions whereas they were motivated by evil intentions. God granted them with limitations their desires against Joseph to fulfill His own purpose through Joseph in saving many people, including Jacob’s own family, from the severe famine. This is so important that it cannot be accented enough. Because God is good His motive in everything He does is always for the ultimate good even when His will is executed through the evil intentions of men.

Second, let’s notice Jesus’ ancestral record through which He was born into the world. There were instances in which this line continued by virtue of the sinful actions of men as, for example, when Judah fathered illegitimate twin sons through his daughter-in-law. One of these sons, Pharez, was the offspring that perpetuated the line to Christ (Genesis, chapter 38; Matthew 1.3; Luke 3.33). Even more remarkable was how God used the adulterous and murderous actions of David to continue the ancestral line. When David’s lust led to adultery with Bathsheba and when it was discovered that she was to have his child, David conspired to have her husband killed. After he was killed David took Bathsheba to be his wife and through this marriage Solomon became one of the offspring who continued the line through Joseph’s side of the family (Matthew 1.6 & 16). So, we can see that God permitted and used men’s sins to advance the genealogical line that brought Jesus into the world.

The case of David brings up something else of interest. We have already noted what David did was displeasing to the Lord (II Samuel 11.27). This gives rise to the question, how can God be displeased with what someone does if his actions are a part of bringing to pass what He has ordained? I think the answer is found by distinguishing between God’s heart and God’s will. The very nature of God cries out against sin. He is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Habakkuk 1.13); that is, He cannot look on iniquity with approbation for “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (I John 1.5). Yet, despite the fact His heart abhors sin, in order to fulfill His Sovereign Will He often does not hold back men from transgressing. This may be a mystery but in a limited way we may be able to relate it to our own experiences. Don’t we often find a difference between our desires and our wills? For example, a person, if left to his preference, may reject a certain food, but if he is faced with extreme hunger he may choose to eat what he dislikes. So, God wills things to happen that are in

accordance with His purposes; yet they themselves are contrary to His nature; i.e., His heart.

Third, in the case when God's anger was toward Israel, "he moved David against them to say, Go number Israel and Judah" (II Samuel 24.1). David's vain pride concerning how he had made his kingdom to greatly prosper was the reason for the judgment upon the people, but, lest someone should argue God forced this upon David we should examine I Chronicles 21.1 where it is shown the means through which this was done: "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." In other words, it was the tempter's work that brought forth the king's actions. This case illustrates how God can use even the devil as a cause to bring His judgments upon sin.

Fourth, Rehoboam's rejection of the wise counsel of the old men to heed the peoples' request for more lenient treatment than Solomon had given them in favor of the young men's counsel to make the peoples' burden even greater was from the Lord for in I Kings 12.15 it is stated: "**the cause was from the LORD**, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat." The counsel of oppressive men set in motion the events leading to the division of Israel into two separate kingdoms. This came as a judgment upon Israel for the sins committed by Solomon and the people in bringing idolatry into the land, and Ahijah had told Jeroboam that he would be king over ten of Israel's tribes. The original record of Ahijah's prophecy commences in I Kings 11.29 but read through 12.33).

Fifth, we note God consented to a lying spirit in the mouths of false prophets who told Ahab that if he fought against Syria he would prosper. By heeding the lies Ahab was killed in battle and this fulfilled the prophecy of God's judgment upon him for his iniquity (I Kings 22.1-40).

Sixth, no sin in human history comes even close to what rebellious and sinful actions men took against Jesus. Yet, it was in this way that Christ accomplished the purpose that brought Him into the world; that was "to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20.28). The apostles came to see that God brought this work to pass through the Lord's sufferings at the wicked hands of men. So, Peter preached this truth to the Jews on the day of Pentecost: "Him, being **delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain**" (Acts 2.23). By these words we see God both ordained

and foreknew the surrendering (that is the meaning of the Greek word used for *delivered* in this case) of His Son so that men filled with wickedness crucified Him. The language is as plain but includes more details in the prayer offered up by the apostles who quoted from the Second Psalm and interpreted the words: “Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, **For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done**” (Acts 4.25-28). The combined words, “determined before” in simple translation means “predestinated.” And by the context it is shown to include the assembling of Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews to play their roles in Christ being crucified.

When we consider these things we can understand what spiritual men had in mind when they wrote that the Lord’s decree did not make God the author of sin nor did it offer violence to the will of the creature, but rather established second causes, and showed His “wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree” (again language from Chapter III of the London Confession of Faith of 1689).

### **Scriptures Cited Supporting The View God’s Role In Sin Goes Beyond Just Permission**

I have been citing scriptures that indicate God allowed sin to take place in order to fulfill His own purposes. However, now I want to look at a few passages that some might erroneously think support the view God actually made men transgress.

First, there is the case of Pharaoh. It is hard not to notice that scripture repeatedly states God hardened his heart. Even before Moses went to Pharaoh to perform the things God gave him to do the Lord told him “but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go” (Exodus 4.21), and this proved to be the case as shown in Exodus 9.13-14; 10.1, 20, & 27; 11.10; 14.4 & 8. God fully intended to use his hardened heart to demonstrate His own power throughout the world as He communicated to him through the mouth of Moses: “Let my people go, that they may serve me. For I will at this time send all my plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that *there is none*

like me in all the earth. For now I will stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth. And in very deed for this *cause* have I raised thee up, for to shew *in* thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth. And yet exaltest thou thyself against my people, that thou wilt not let them go (Exodus 9.13-17)? The human mind may have a hard time with these words. God had given a commandment to Pharaoh at the same time He hardened his heart so that he would not obey the command and He did these things to make His own great power known throughout the world and that at the expense of this ruler and his nation. And Paul, picking up on this same truth, wrote: “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up; that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay; of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? *What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” (Romans 9.17-22)?

It is hard to imagine that anyone could get free will out of these texts. God did not intend for Pharaoh to willingly let Israel go. God did purpose to bring destruction upon Egypt. However, let's not start feeling sorry for poor Pharaoh. The fact his case demonstrates God purposed him to have a hardened heart ought not to lead us to the conclusion God authored his sin. Pick up again Paul's words, “What if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, **endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?**” God placed Pharaoh on the throne of a great nation and endured with a wicked ruler. I asked the question before. I'll ask it again. Can anyone suppose God has to force a sinner to commit iniquity? I'll make the question more specific regarding this ruler's hardened heart. Did God have to force upon him a hardened heart? It is interesting to note that there are also texts in Exodus that state either it was Pharaoh who hardened his own heart or that state his heart was hardened without stating who did the hardening as in 7.22; 8.15, 19, and 32. Further, from his mouth came confession of his own transgressions. When the plague of hail came upon the land, “Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the LORD *is* righteous,

and I and my people *are* wicked” (Exodus 9.27). Again, when the plague of locusts came upon Egypt, “Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only” (Exodus 10.16-17).

It is important to notice what command Pharaoh’s heart was so hardened to disobey.

Again, it was this: “Let my people go, that they may serve me” (Exodus 9.13). If we dwell upon this fact it becomes clear how God hardened his heart. He simply allowed him enough reason to think it was profitable to keep Israel in the land. The Pharaohs held power over the Hebrews that they did not want to give up. Israel served Egypt well as slaves, and even when the Egyptians worried about the increased numbers of Israelites the Pharaoh who reigned at the time Moses was born tried to weed their numbers down by having the newborn males killed (Exodus 1.7-22). It was not his desire to be completely rid of the Hebrews. By the time Moses was sent back to Egypt the then present ruler still held the Israelites as slaves and he was unwilling to accept their freedom. A comparison might be found with regard to the unwillingness of early American slave owners to abandon slavery. Slaves were too important to the slave owners to willingly give them up. Before the plagues commenced Pharaoh’s heart was hardened against any thought of giving Israel up. When the lighter plagues came upon the land he weighed in his mind whether it was better to endure these troubles or let the Hebrews go. He concluded the early plagues were not severe enough so his heart was hardened to disobey the command. However, when these plagues became more severe, as with the hailstorm, he then relented for a while and promised Moses and Aaron that if this storm was stopped: “I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer” (Exodus 9.28). However, when “Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, neither would he let the children of Israel go; as the LORD had spoken by Moses” (Exodus 9.34-35). Then, came the dreadful tenth plague when the non-Hebrew firstborns died throughout the land in one night. Finally, enough was enough. It was no longer worth it to keep the slaves and Israel was commanded to go (Exodus 12.29-36). Well, almost enough was enough. When it was reported to Pharaoh that the children of Israel fled, “the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done



this, that we have let Israel go **from serving us**” (Exodus 14.5)? The point is it was Israel’s service to Egypt that was the means God used to harden his heart. God forced nothing upon him that was out of line with his own natural desires. The active role God played in hardening Pharaoh’s heart was by providentially arranging the circumstances that led his sinful heart to tilt in the direction it went, and in the end God accomplished His own Sovereign Will in glorifying His name throughout the world.

Second, there are scriptures that report God sends blindness upon men concerning holy and heavenly truths. Isaiah 6.9-10 states: “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.” Each of the gospels quotes from this prophecy. In Matthew 13.13-15 it is said Jesus cited these verses when He gave the reason why He spoke to the people in parables: “Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive; For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and *their ears* are dull of hearing; and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” Mark 4.11-12 and Luke 8.10 also reference this occasion. Then, John also quotes the text but the occasion is different and he is the one, not Jesus, who applies the words. He had just pointed out that despite the many miracles Jesus performed the Jews still did not believe in him. Then he wrote: “Therefore they could not believe, because Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (John 12.37; 39-40). Further, Paul used the text when he spoke and wrote concerning unbelievers among the Jews (Acts 28.24-27 & Romans 11.8).

Take whatever place in scripture you prefer, they all have in common the fact God did not intend for any of these people to receive the blessed truths of the Lord. No allowances were made for them to be converted, or to be forgiven. If anyone thinks it is not clear enough in Isaiah, Mark, Luke, or Acts, it is very plain in John and Romans that God sent this blindness upon them. But again, the essential question can be asked in a rephrased way,

why must we suppose God had to send blindness upon them when blindness to spiritual things was a part of their depravity anyway? If, as we have already shown by scripture, men do not understand or seek after God, we must suppose they are blind to heavenly truth as long as they are left in their natural condition. Therefore, I can only conclude that the blindness God sent upon them is equivalent to God giving them up to further blindness of heart. It compares to the language we have already examined in Romans 1 wherein God gave men up to the unrighteousness they naturally desired (verses 24, 26, & 28). In short, the words are not to be understood that God forced them to be blind. The fact Jesus quoted Isaiah's prophecy as a reason why He spoke in parables illustrates this truth. They did not have the ability to understand His plain speech but by His parables they were even further confounded. Two other verses follow Paul's quote from Isaiah, chapter 6 where he references Psalm 69.22-23. Here is the translation from Romans 11.9-10: "And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always." Further, there are Paul's words to the Thessalonians when he spoke of the revealing of the Wicked: "*Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders. And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thessalonians 2.9-12). Now, it should be clear from this language that God did not force blindness upon them at all. They already did not have the truth and they had no desire for it, but the strong delusion was something Satan fathered. God sent and used the devil's work so that these men who already had been on a step where they did not believe the Lord stepped downward even further to a place where they started believing even Satan's lies.

Although the language from all of these texts may be strong enough to indicate God's activity goes beyond a mere permission when they are examined more fully in the light of the context it is hard to conclude they are saying God coerced sinners to transgress. Rather, He simply gave them over through various means to walk in the further state of blindness that was agreeable to their nature.

Third, there are the words of Isaiah 45.7: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these *things*"

(Isaiah 45.7). If we have no other verse in the Bible than this someone might reasonably conclude God is the author of sin. However, since there are verses that show God in a different light we should not be hasty to draw such a conclusion and we should examine this text more fully.

These words in Isaiah are addressed to Cyrus (verse 1), a Persian king. He was not even born at the time the prophecy was given. Years later when he did live he became the king who fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy that the Jews would be allowed to return from Babylonian exile and rebuild their temple (Ezra 1.1-4). The Persians' religion was polytheistic. Among their beliefs they held one of their gods controlled things that were good whereas another of their gods controlled things that were bad. God had a message waiting to give to this king when he would finally be established on his throne. Although this was many years away from happening He spoke it as though he was already a ruler to show the certainty of the prophecy: "I *am* the LORD, and *there is* no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is* none beside me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else" (Isaiah 45.5-6). That is, contrary to what the Persians believed, there is only one God and He brings forth all things, good and bad. There are two kinds of evil. There is the evil of sin and there is the evil of trouble. With reference to verse 7, notice that evil there is in contrast to peace. The contrast is not between righteousness and evil. I, therefore, submit the evil spoken of in the text more aptly concerns the evil of trouble wherein one does not find peace. A similar text is found in the prophecy of Amos. All of the catastrophic events Amos prophesied upon Israel illustrate the sense in which God creates evil: "shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done *it* (Amos 3.7). The evil done in the city focused upon the trouble the adversary would cause them (verse 11), upon the troubles of those dwelling in Samaria (verse 12), and upon God's judgment upon their altars of false religion in Bethel (verse 14), and upon the smiting of their winter and summerhouses, their ivory houses, and their great houses (verse 15). It is in this sense we should understand the evil spoken of in Isaiah, chapter 45 as well as the evil spoken of in Amos, chapter 3.

Even scriptures that use language indicating God's more active role with regard to evil should not be interpreted to think God forces men to transgress. However, these texts do stand against the Arminian View that God wants everyone to know the truth. God ordains that some remain in sin

and that as further judgment upon them their sins are even further compounded.

### **The Divine View Of Contingencies**

Let's return to the experiment but this time let's add a twist. What if when you let go of the quarter it rolled to a spot where it could not be retrieved? You then would not have been able to pick up the quarter as I later requested. We have now introduced the idea of contingencies into this experiment. What if! What if! What if! What if you did not participate in the experiment? You would then not have lost the quarter. What if I left the experiment section out of this article? You then would not have had an experiment to try. What if you had gone to a safer place where the quarter could not have rolled to some unrecoverable spot? Again, you would have been able to retrieve the money.

Now, transfer this thought to God. Consider these truths. First, God has perfect prescience. James told the Church: "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15.18). Second, God has absolute providential rule over all things, as scripture speaks of Him, "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1.11). From these two truths we see that nothing happens that He does not foresee and nothing happens apart from His authority. However, the Bible also even suggests God knows how things would have been if He had purposed and acted differently. Thus, Christ said: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! **for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.** But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: **for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.** But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matthew 11.21-24). In short, the Lord knew human history would have been altered if He had only sent the mighty works that came to Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum at an earlier date upon Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. The Lord knew there would have then been different outcomes for those cities.

Just think of it! Not only is God's knowledge of all things that take place infinite but He also is able to visualize the enumerable things that might have happened differently had He willed things differently. And just think of this! Human history might have been written completely different. What if God had not made the devil? What if God had not given a commandment forbidding eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Fast forward to David's time and ask what if God had David sleep through the night preventing him from arising from his bed to see Bathsheba from his roof as she was washing herself? We can multiply the "what ifs" many times over and conclude much wickedness and misery could have been avoided. Had God been willing He could have utterly changed the course of human history away from the iniquities that occurred in this world. Nothing can stop God from executing His will: "our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Psalm 115.3).

All of this brings up an interesting point. Arminians are fully aware sin exists but they hold God would be unjust if He predestinates it. They also confess He is both holy and almighty. Therefore they must settle the question how it can be that sin can exist in a world created and governed by a holy and omnipotent God. Their response is that God really does not want sin to exist but He allows it. This returns us to their doctrinal brand of permissive will. However, if they would more carefully study the matter they might realize their response does not solve the issue they tried to resolve. They just as well might acknowledge He preordains sin. Consider this. The human mind considers it is wrong when someone is in a position to prevent a wrongful act but refuses to do so. A number of years ago a New York City woman was viciously attacked and murdered one summer evening in her apartment. Since it was a hot evening her windows were raised so that many people in the apartment complex heard her cries for help and some even witnessed the crime against her as it was being committed. Yet, not one person attempted to rescue her or even bothered to call the police to report what was happening. When interviewed afterward why they did not try to help her they answered they did not want to get involved. The local and national media picked up this story and there was outrage throughout the country against the people who were in a position to do something but instead did nothing. Follow this logic. If God is able to prevent sin but chooses not to do so, how is the Arminian "permissive will" doctrine any different in the final analysis than the "predestination" doctrine?

I acknowledge God could have governed His creation so that there would have been no sin but, unlike the Arminians, when I speak of His permissive will I hold He fully intends for the sins He allows to occur. I reckon God has neither revealed through His word nor given to the human mind a complete answer to all questions we can raise about why God permits sin to exist. However, it is self evident to the child of God that sin in fact does exist and likewise it is a firm belief sown in his heart that God is both absolutely holy and absolutely in control of all things. Paul never tried to explain how God could still be just by loving Jacob while hating Esau before either of them were born or before they had done good or evil in order that His purpose of election might stand, but he anticipated the question some would raise due to that fact: “*Is there unrighteousness with God?*” You will notice he answered simply: “God forbid” (Romans 9.11-14) and offered no further explanation. The Arminian, not content with leaving the secret things to God (Deuteronomy 29.29), tries to answer why God allows evil. He thinks God does not want to violate man’s free choice even if it means he might sin. That God wants such a thing has absolutely no scriptural basis but here is a scripture that saints can relate to this matter: “For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55.8-9). Further, God has been pleased by some examples, notably the cases of Joseph and Jesus, to show us He can intend the same events for good that sinful men intend for evil. It is far better to settle the matter at the point where revelation takes it; that is, to God’s glory (Revelation 4.11) than to entertain the false notion God places man’s freewill on the high throne where it can decide how the world is governed.

### **Section III. Good Deeds**

Let’s go to the experiment just one more time. You may recall when the coin fell from your hand I specifically requested that you not immediately pick it up. It was a short time later that I instructed you to do so. If I did not do this you know as well as I the quarter would have remained on the floor until you or someone else reached down and picked it up. The final point to be made from this experiment is the fact the cause of the coin lifting from the floor is entirely different from the cause of its falling to the floor. Once again the principles concerning the causes are these. In the first instance you intentionally permitted the quarter to fall. In the second instance you intentionally made the quarter lift from the floor. The coin readily fell to the

ground when you let go of it but it had no power to lift itself even a fraction of the distance from the ground. We have been examining sin from the standpoint of God, with restraints, permitting Satan, angels, and men to sin. It is now time to look at God's hand in making men perform good deeds.

## **Gospel Principles**

When we contemplate the essence of the gospel of Christ we must direct our attention to the display of God's mercies wherein sinful creatures are redeemed from sin and brought to a state of eternal glory. When we look for an explanation how this could possibly be we can come to only one conclusion; that is, God causes it to happen.

We begin with the fact God intended to have some of Adam's race saved from sin. From eternity God preordained to take from fallen men persons whom He loved to be the recipients of His salvation. We have already shown from previous verses in II Thessalonians, chapter 2, that God sends "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" to some men, but in verses 13-14 Paul turns his attention to those God purposed to save. He wrote: "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because **God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation** through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This beginning commenced before the creation of the world. Thus, Paul wrote in another place: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: 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**, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1.3-7). Consistent with these words Paul wrote to Timothy concerning God: "Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Timothy 1.9-10). Consider the implications springing from these texts. Before the events stated in the first verse of scripture: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1.1), before the devil was created, before Adam was formed from

the earth's dust, before Eve was formed from him, before both were forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, before, in fact, they ate of that tree and received the sentence of death, and before every member of Adam's posterity were born into this world, and before any one of them had opportunity to repent and trust in the Lord, God had decreed some to the blessings of everlasting salvation through Jesus Christ. It is a disgrace that modern preachers, their books, articles, and pamphlets never deal with this vital truth when they go about telling others of "God's simple plan of salvation."

The doctrine is set forth in the plainest terms that God ordained this salvation to be provided to the elect through Jesus Christ. We are chosen in Him, predestinated to adoption by Him, made accepted in Him, redeemed by His blood, and made recipients of forgiveness by His grace. Salvation comes to none except through Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Him (John 14.6). Peter said of Him: "**Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved**" (Acts 4.12). It has been according to the Divine purpose that the Father has given His people to the charge of Christ. Thus, the Lord said He came "not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20.28). The "many" for whom He gave His life are shown to be the ones He spoke of in His prayer: "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17.2-3). The angel referred to these "many" given to His charge when he declared what Christ would do for them: "**he shall save his people from their sins**" (Matthew 1.21). Further, it should be clear that the total human race is not considered His redeemed people for in Revelation this blessed Lamb of God is praised: "for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood **out of** every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5.9). Have you picked up what is taught? He has not redeemed every one. Rather He has redeemed the people referred to as "us" out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation. The rest were not redeemed but left as they were.

Arminians cry out against the doctrine that states God does not love and does not want all people saved. They charge that such a doctrine, if true, would make God unjust. However, I have heard the same Arminians confess many times, whether it was just talk or sincerely meant, that if they



got what they deserved they would perish in hell. Well then, if that is the case how can God be charged with being unjust by intending that they perish? Could you not reason from their argument that God would even be more unjust if He had caused the entire human race to perish? Since “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3.23), what man can raise any charge against God if he perishes in his sins? It is a tribute to God’s grace that He saves some. As Paul made the point from Isaiah’s prophecy: “Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha” (Romans 9.29; Isaiah 1.9).

Unless someone is blessed quite early with the evidence he is a child of God, such as was the case with John who filled with the Holy Spirit leaped for joy in his mother’s womb while in the presence of the unborn Christ (Luke 1.15, 41, & 44), there is nothing at first that signals saving grace has been bestowed to anyone born into this world. As the quarter was a lifeless object that could not rise above where it had fallen, so, as has been previously noted Paul, described how the saints at Ephesus had also once been lifeless relative to the things of God by stating they had been “dead in trespasses and sins” and he further characterized this condition as the normal state of unregenerate mankind (Ephesians 2.1-3). Consistent with this, Job taught there was nothing apparent from our natural birth that in any way resembled godliness when he said: “Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? not one” (Job 14.4), and David’s testimony about himself was in line with those words when he wrote: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51.4). The sinful state described by these inspired writers is an abiding state for in Jeremiah’s prophecy the sinner is mocked with the words: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *Then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jeremiah 13.23). As the coin had no power to lift itself from the ground, so no member of Adam’s race has the power to lift himself from the pit of iniquity. But I say this state abides for the elect only until such time as God is pleased in mercy to reach down and lift the sinner up from the state of sin.

With this in mind let’s look at a few scriptures that show it is God that causes His people to be brought to the Lord. From the Psalms are the words: “Blessed *is the man whom* thou choosest, and **causest to approach unto thee**” (Psalm 65.4). From Jeremiah are the words: “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have **I drawn thee**” (Jeremiah 31.3). Jesus said: “No man **can come to me, except the Father which hath sent**

**me draw him:** and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6.44). The Lord’s drawing power was the basis for Christ’s previous words: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (verses 37-39).

These things are not done through God’s mere permission. Permission would accomplish nothing of this kind due to man’s sinful nature. Rather, it is His determination to lift His chosen up that they rise above their former state.

Not only is God the active cause of His elect being brought to the Lord, He also performs the active part in converting them through repentance and faith and giving them an agreeableness to His ways. We acknowledge Christ commanded both repentance and faith: “repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1.15), but we are also taught by scripture that these things are the work of God in us. Concerning repentance Ephraim cried out: “turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou *art* the LORD my God. Surely **after that I was turned, I repented**; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon *my* thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth” (Jeremiah 31.18-19). We have probably all seen the spinning action of a toy top but it does not turn on its own. It requires an outside force in order to turn just as sinners need God’s power in order to repent. Concerning faith, which by the way, is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5.22), Paul told the Philippians “unto you **it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him**, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1.29). Concerning God’s New Covenant people being made agreeable to His laws Jeremiah prophesied: “**I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts**; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31.33). Further, Paul taught that we who are saved by grace apart from works “are **his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them**” (Ephesians 2-8-10).

These things also are not accomplished by mere permission. They result from God’s Will to actively work within His people.

## **Perseverance Of The Saints**

As God performs the internal work of grace that brings His elect initially into His fellowship it should also be plain it is not by permission but by God's continuing active work His people are kept. Thus, Paul told the Philippians: "Being confident of this very thing, that **he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ**" (Philippians 1.6). Peter taught those who were recipients of God's abundant mercies were "**kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Peter 1.3 & 5).

By perseverance we do not mean that once a person is "born again" (rightly interpreted means *born from above*) he will no longer commit sin (John 3.3; I John 1.8-9). What we mean is that God will keep him in such a state wherein his faith is not lost and he will be preserved to everlasting glory. The two texts quoted above are sufficient testimonies to this truth. But we cannot discount the fact the Lord accompanies His internal work by superintending the ministry of His word to ensure that it is sent and received by His elect.

We have already quoted from II Thessalonians concerning the elect: "Whereunto **he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (II Thessalonians 2.14). How greatly have the heavenly born children been blessed through His word to hear the glad tidings that Christ loves them and died for their sins and that He rose from the grave, ascended into heaven, intercedes for them, and will one day return to resurrect the dead and gather His saints who are alive at His coming to be with Him forever. It is through His word that men are directed to believe in Jesus, the Savior of sinners. Paul, by a series of questions, taught that the saved would not call upon the name of the Lord except they first believed, and this believing necessitated their hearing, and this necessitated preaching that, in turn, necessitated that the preachers **be sent**" (Romans 10.13-15). I know there has been a division between theologians who hold to Holy Spirit regeneration and those who hold to gospel regeneration and Old School, Primitive Baptists hold, I believe rightfully, to Holy Spirit regeneration. However, we should be quick to admit there is such an inseparable link between the two that at times it is hard to distinguish between the internal operation of the Spirit and the external result of the word. It may be easier to make this separation by seeing that God sends his servants not only to preach in specific places but He also sends them to be heard by specific persons, as the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts, chapter 8), Cornelius and his household (Acts, chapter 10), and many at Corinth (Acts 18.1, & 9-10);

these having already been secretly prepared by regeneration to receive His word, as in those spoken of as “good ground” in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13.8 & 23).

It is also through the ministry of the word that the Church is blessed to grow in Christ. Paul wrote that when Christ ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men wherein: “he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4.8, & 11-16).

The fact men are called to preach God’s word in no way should lead anyone to conclude God’s part in causing good works is diminished. Rather, since He has full control of what His word is to accomplish (Isaiah 55.10-11) and to whom it is sent saints should continually praise Him for all means through which He brings forth good in them.

#### Section IV. Perceptions Of The Saints As They Daily Live In The Faith

Maybe this article should have ended with the last section. After all, I believe I have met the minimum requirements I gave myself at the outset; that is, to explain the approach God uses in executing His will concerning evil deeds and how it differs from the approach He uses concerning good deeds. Concerning evil, He permits it. Concerning good, He makes it happen in people who otherwise would not perform it. However, the temptation was too great to end the writing without looking also at the realities saints face in their daily course. Believers have to deal with the fact the scriptures present many teachings and they have to understand the Bible in such a way in order to incorporate the whole of biblical teachings so that texts neither contradict nor seem inconsistent with daily experience. For example, we like to weigh in on verses that highlight predestination and

grace and even obedience when we can easily see a connection in the verses that link it to what God has ordained for us to do. However, we may be apt to avoid passages that deal with commands that appear to be conditional with regard to outcomes: blessings if we obey them, but judgments if we don't. We speak against the conditional" doctrine but it is important we have a solid scriptural foundation for rejecting it and for dealing with passages cited by those who favor it. We also need to understand it neither leads to sound doctrine nor good practice if we ignore scripture that we cannot fit into our theological framework. Rather, we need to find the place where biblical teaching provides harmony and balance. And I will be bold here in saying that even the most ardent believer in absolute predestination will still share his view of this doctrine with a functional visualization of his own ability to govern his daily affairs. In most cases it will be so natural for him to do this he will not even realize he is mixing predestination with self-determination in his daily conduct and conversation. You may not like to admit this is true but if you think about it I think you will realize it is true.

Let's return to the subject of contingencies but this time as viewed by men. Like God, we also have this ability; howbeit it is not on the same level as that which belongs to the Deity. There may be a middle ground between how God in Heaven views contingencies and how men on earth view them. That middle ground may be found in the Incarnate Son of God who was an example to us in mixing predestination, feelings, and speculation altogether into one bag. Hear Jesus out on what He said concerning His sufferings. With regard to what was predestinated Christ knew He was preordained to come into this world to suffer death on behalf of His people. He openly said He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20.28), He repeatedly told His disciples about the things He would suffer in Jerusalem (Matthew 16.21; 17.12 & 22-23; 20.17-19; 26.2 & 21), and with regard to His feelings He spoke sorrowfully of this time when He said: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but **for this cause came I unto this hour**" (John 12.27). Yet, despite the fact He knew the course ordained for Him He also speculated that He could do something that would have changed it. When Peter used the sword against the high priest's servant in his attempt to protect Him from the mob He told Peter to put up his weapon and then added: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now **pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels.**" Then, as if to contradict His own statement He indicated He knew deliverance was not meant to come His way: "But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that

**thus it must be** (Matthew 26.51-54). In one breath He speculated He could make a simple call to His Father that would save Him from capture and in the next breath He said the scriptures kept Him from making such a prayer. Therefore, He did not do what He speculated He could do. The prayer He actually had made to His Father a short while before the mob came to take Him was the prayer of great feeling that was in line with what was ordained for His life: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but, as thou *wilt*” (Matthew 26.39 and also see verses 42 & 44). In the end, He must fulfill the cause for which He came into the world.

What is transferable in this is that the saints also have minds that can visualize both predestination and contingencies. This is important. It does not matter how strongly they hold to predestination they still speculate what men do may affect outcomes. I say they see it may affect outcomes because here is how the middle ground of the Incarnate Son of God is unlike believers: Christ knew the certainty of the outcome but with saints it usually remains just speculation until outcomes occur. So, consider Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who faced the fiery furnace for refusing to bow before Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image. Since they had settled upon not following the king’s order they knew what this refusal might mean. They knew they might lose their lives in the furnace but they also knew God might preserve their lives. They told the king: “If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Daniel 3.17-18). Consider Peter’s words to Simon after he offer money to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter wasted no words in speaking about this man’s wickedness. He told him his heart was not right in God’s sight and that he was “in the gall of bitterness, and *in* the bond of iniquity.” Nevertheless the apostle was in no position to judge “before the time” (I Corinthians 4.5) whether or not God would leave him in such a state so he gave him the only advice he could: “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, **if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee**” (Acts 8.21-23). Consider the wisdom of the king of Nineveh who reacted to Jonah’s preaching that “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” by proclaiming a fast, and having the people cry out to the Lord and to turn from their evil ways, telling them: “**Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not**” (Jonah 3.4-9). Consider Esther who was uncertain whether or not king

Ahasuerus would approve her coming before him to plead the cause of her countrymen in the face of Haman's wicked plans against the Jews. The perils the Jews faced in Persia were so great that notwithstanding her own endangerment she saw no course but to go before Ahasuerus saying I will "go in unto the king, which *is* not according to the law: and **if I perish, I perish**" (Esther 4.16). All of these are biblical examples how we pursue our course in life not fully realizing ahead of time what God has determined will happen.

Since future outcomes are not usually certain to us we ought to readily heed the words of James with regard to any long-range plans we make. We ought not to place priority upon our own interests or take for granted what our future holds but we ought to fearfully seek what God's will is for us. This inspired writer said: "Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye *ought* to say, **If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that**" (James 4.13-15). Again, this we should do regarding long-range planning. However, in the believer's daily life things come upon him so often and so quickly that in order to react to them he instinctively speaks and performs without forethought to God's will. I will take it upon myself here to be presumptuous and venture to speak for all saints concerning how they conduct themselves in their daily pilgrimage. You evaluate whether or not I rightly speak.

If you are driving down a highway when suddenly you see a vehicle coming at you at a high rate of speed in the lane you are driving you may consider yourself a believer in absolute predestination but you will not be thinking at that time what might be God's will for you to do. In whatever moments you might have you will be reacting instinctively to avoid the crash. Even without adequate time to think things through your natural reaction will be such to presume you might be able to prevent the head on collision. Assuming you do manage to avoid the crash you then see it as a case in which God gave you the good sense and means so that no injury or death occurred. Your actions in no way will destroy your belief in God's absolute predestination. Now, believer, did I not accurately state the case in all of its aspects?

That example may have been too extreme to fit the routine so let me give others. Whether or not he avoids smoking, an unhealthy diet, or use of a seat belt while in a car, or any other life style issue the believer will still see that the probabilities are there for him to have a longer and healthier life if he follows a course that tends toward health and safety. Yet, the believer holds that his days on earth are as God has appointed them to be and he does not see a contradiction because he believes God also controls all means for determining how long and how well he lives, including how he develops his life styles. Isn't that how the believer reconciles these matters? Now, a child of God may make a general prayer at the beginning of each day for the Lord to direct His thoughts, words, and steps according to His will but I can guarantee in his moment by moment course he will not be thinking predestination when he says every word or takes every action. Believer, am I not correct? And when he sins the child of God will not be justifying his deeds by telling himself it was the will of God that He did as he did. Rather, his mind will be as David's: "Against thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that **thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest**" (Psalm 51.4). His thoughts will be turned too much toward the fact he transgressed, and that God spoke against him justly and was clear in His judgment than to try to figure out what specific purpose God had in mind that allowed him to commit the sin. Believer, have I not correctly stated your case?

The point of all this is in no way meant to minimize the predestination of all things. It is simply to acknowledge in our daily course we think, make decisions, say and do things with a mindset that we manage our lives. We may be uncertain how the consequences of our actions may play out but we know our deeds do in fact produce outcomes. It is afterward that reflecting upon the role God has played in our lives we rejoice in the wonderful words of Paul: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose" (Romans 8.28). Believer, does not this correctly describe your case? Have I written anything so far that you deem out of step with your thoughts, experiences or what you consider sound doctrine?

Let's approach this in another way. The Lord's commands lead our minds toward the presumption we can direct our course by how we respond to them. Some may be quite easy to follow. If you have no inclination to rob from others the command against stealing may not be hard to handle. On the other hand when you come upon the words: "Recompense to no man evil for



evil” you may find this much harder to follow, and the words in the next verse: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12.17-18) may really cause you problems. If you find yourself in a foul mood you may find it nearly impossible to live peaceably with anyone you come in contact with on that particular day and if you find someone who is constantly in your company that you do not like at all you may question how, if you have the love of Christ, your capacity for kindness can be so low. Am I mentioning things here that the child of God never faces? Struggling with keeping the word of the Lord comes to the forefront of your mind in these cases. You are not saying to yourself that if you obey, God predestinated it but then, if you disobey it, well, that was predestinated too. The imperative to keep the command is what will have the greatest impact upon you and if you fail to keep it your sorrow for your failing will come to the forefront of your thoughts. Am I not properly characterizing you when I say this? It seems predestination and commands are often far apart in the routine of life. Yet, let’s not be too hasty in making this judgment. What appears may not be the case at all.

Consider what happened to Paul when he was a prisoner taken by sea to Rome. All on board the ship faced a horrible storm. It was so bad for so long that Luke wrote: “all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.” However, while the storm raged Paul presented the people with good news. He told the ship’s crew: “And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for **there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.** For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; **thou must be brought before Caesar:** and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit **we must be cast upon a certain island.**” Due to this revelation Paul did not have to speculate what would happen. The ship had to be destroyed. The lives of all on board the ship had to be spared. All had to be cast upon an island. Paul had to appear before Caesar. The angel had told him what must happen. However, as events unfolded Paul said something that may appear as a contradiction. If you will, it was presented in such a way to suggest to the others that what he had previously stated in definite terms might not happen after all if those on board did not heed his warning. As the ship approached land the shipmen were about to abandon the ship resulting in Paul issuing a warning to “the centurion and to the soldiers, **Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved**” (Acts 27.20, 22-26, & 31). Paul did not tell the people originally their safety depended

upon following orders. What happened to the previous no-strings-attached assurances he had given them concerning their safety? The people now had to deal with the word of warning.

Let's face it, God's way of presenting truth in His word may not always fit into the systematic theology we develop. However, there is a truth we can glean from what happened during this storm. Remember the words quoted at the outset from the early Baptist Confessions? The one of 1644 had stated: "Truth is that whereby he declares that alone which he hath decreed, and though his sayings may seem to sound sometimes another thing, yet the sense of them doth always agree with the decree" and the one of 1646 stated: "God had decreed in Himself, before the world was, concerning all things, whether necessary, accidental or voluntary, with all the circumstances of them, to work, dispose, and bring about all things according to the counsel of His own will, to His glory." What happened in Paul's case is consistent with the creedal statements of our past brethren. Paul's word of warning played a vital role in bringing to pass what the angel told him was ordained to happen. What the apostle spoke brings to mind the words of Proverbs 16.1: "the answer of the tongue, *is* from the LORD." Paul's command and warning was deemed worthy of being heeded and they all escaped to the island called Melita (Acts 27.44-28.1). Am I drawing a false conclusion here when I say that what is commanded and what is predestinated may seem to be afar off but the commands really are a part of what God has ordained to bring to pass His intended outcome?

Capture the core of this lesson. Scripture may not always be packaged to suit the way we want it presented. God is going to work "all things after the counsel of his own will (Ephesians 1.11) but He is also going to use His word to continually commanded, admonish, exhort, rebuke, and even warn saints (II Timothy 4.2; Colossians 1.28) to persevere in the faith. On first appearance the two may not seem to come together but apply the principle given to us with regard to Paul's journey at sea and we can see that harmony and balance of biblical teaching that I mentioned we need to find.

Apply this to the daily Christian pilgrimage. God's commands tell us what is the path we should take. They leave us with the presumption we can obey them. However, doctrine teaches us that it is the Lord who enables Christians to persevere in faith. In light of this examine the words of Paul. He admonished the Christians at Philippi: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my

absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**” You do not have to examine the context far to realize Paul wrote these words to people he already counted as saints. He addressed them as his “brethren” and he acknowledged they were and had been faithful in the past. However, by this command he communicated they should persevere in working out their salvation. This should have led the saints to assume God was requiring them to constantly endeavor to keep the faith. After all, talk all you will about the assumption commands mean saints can keep them the reality is they often do not. They needed to be on guard against falling away from what they have. It behooves God’s people to take hold of Paul’s admonition. Okay, so do we have the essence of it? The apostle can now move on to another subject. But wait a minute! He did not take up another subject. Instead he stayed on the same subject but presented it in an entirely different way going this time away from a command in favor of a precious doctrine: “For it is **God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure**” (Philippians 2.12-13). Why in the world did he do this? Why confuse the reader? Hey, it’s either up to the Christian to work out his own salvation or it isn’t. If God commands him to do it the obligation falls upon him. On the other hand if his willingness and performance to do God’s pleasure is the result of the work He does in him why bother with a command? He’s going to do His pleasure anyway. I think these two verses serve to teach us that neither truth can rightfully be separated from the other. God has given us by command to view what is before us to do along with the mindset we must do it while at the same time He is pleased by doctrine to have us know that it is He that gives us the will and enables us to obey.

Before leaving this text let me make one final observation. Unless your case is completely different from mine you realize if the Spirit is not working effectually in your life the most you can do with regard to the commandment is to pay nominal heed to it. My own efforts never produce the “fear and trembling” required to keep the whole command. Consistent with what Paul taught in the 13<sup>th</sup> verse the Lord said through Jeremiah: “I will put my fear in their heart, that they shall not depart from me” (Jeremiah 32.40). Without this fear, we can do no more than go through the motions of obedience.

There may be a better way to bridge the gap between what is given to us in scripture concerning commands and what is declared in doctrine but this is the best I can do. It is this. By commands God’s saints are told what they must do or refrain from doing, by admonitions and exhortations they are stirred to do His commands, by rebukes they are shamed for their failings,

by warnings they are advised of His judgments upon wrongdoers, by promises they have the expectation of better things, and by the doctrines of the Bible, notwithstanding their many failings, they have enough reason to hope the characterization Jesus gave applies to them: **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish,** neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand” (John 10.27-28). This teaching confirms the doctrine both of the perseverance and the final preservation of the saints. Therefore, “brethren, suffer the word of exhortation” (Hebrews 13.22) seeing the end to which God intends: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5.16); “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened (Matthew 7.7-8); “be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12.2); “my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (I Corinthians 15.58); “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient {that is, not proper}: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them” (Ephesians 5.3-7); “See that none render evil for evil unto any *man*; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all *men*” (I Thessalonians 5.15); “Quench not the Spirit” (I Thessalonians 5.19); “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*” (Hebrews 10.25); “be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1.22); “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4.8); “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (I Peter 2.1-2); “it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 4); and all the hosts of words given to the saints for their spiritual well being that in turn gives glory to God.

Of all the many words given to us to follow may we never forget this one: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1.8-9). I suppose there is hardly any other way a person glorifies His Savior more than when he sincerely seeks cleansing from His Redeemer and even in those cases where he fails miserably to keep His word the guilt itself should be an instrument that leads him to seek afresh His mercies. See the tenderness of David’s heart when he confessed before the prophet, Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD” (II Samuel 12.13), and in his Psalm he wrote concerning the occasion: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51.1).

Commands that first appear as conditional turn out to be actual reflections of the life of Christ that operates within the recipient of the heavenly birth. The Lord’s act of regeneration is not where God ends His work leaving the rest for a child of God to work out for himself. Rather, there is a life principle established; what Paul refers to as “the law of the Spirit **of life in Christ Jesus**” (Romans 8.2) wherein Christ actually continues to operate within him. So, Paul testified: I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless **I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me**: and the life which I now live in the flesh **I live by the faith of the Son of God**, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2.20). This truth was made even plainer when he wrote of his low ranking as an apostle and unworthiness in being called one because he earlier had persecuted the Church, but, wrote he, “by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but **I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me**” (I Corinthians 15.9-10). Now if any boasting came from this apostle’s pen at all it was not to boast about himself but to boast in the Lord who lived and worked within him.

There is a real way for us to examine whether or not we have reason to hope we are His people. The Lord uttered these words to His disciples shortly before He died: “If ye love me, keep my commandments,” and then followed up with these: “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (John 14.15 & 23). These simple words should carry a powerful message to anyone professing His name. Brethren, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates” (II Corinthians 13.5)?

Preachers, if you come upon a sincere inquirer who seeks the way of salvation don't start by getting into a doctrinal discussion with him. Instead, direct him immediately to the only source for salvation. Follow the example of Paul when he instructed the trembling jailor: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house (Acts 16.31). The apostle did not get tangled up with the fact the man phrased his question to suppose there was something he could do to be saved (Acts 16.30). Rather, he gave priority to the fact he needed to know about the Savior and what this Savior could do. So do likewise. If the Lord has laid the groundwork in the inquirer the effectual work of the Christ will be manifest and later you may speak to him more fully concerning the electing, justifying, redeeming, regenerating grace of God. And, by all means, along the way don't forget to instruct him to be baptized. Apparently, Paul didn't forget. The text does not inform us of all the words Paul spoke to the jailor but there is enough to gather that he and his soon received this ordinance (Acts 16.33). Preacher, am I out of line with the Word of God in instructing you in these things?

#### Section V. Providential Ways God Controls Mankind's Evils

Let me briefly touch upon a few other ways; these providential, in which God works among men generally, both elect and reprobate, to bring about good things in the world.

Saints often find that when God sends troubles upon them they are more apt to seek the Lord for help. So, David noted: "*The righteous* cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles" (Psalm 34.17), and "Mine enemies would daily swallow *me* up: for *they be* many that fight against me, O thou most High. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Psalm 56.2-3). Not only do troubles turn their hearts to seek the Lord, but afflictions also lead them to correct their conduct. Thus, the psalmist wrote: "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word," and "*It is* good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalm 119.67 & 71). Troubles may or may not have some subduing effect upon unbelievers. We have already pointed out that just the prophecy of judgment upon King Ahab and his house was enough to curtail his wickedness (I Kings 21.17-29). However, I confess this is often not the case with the wicked and troubles will often cause them to react with even more ungodliness. So, John wrote in Revelation that when God gave an angel power to scorch men with fire they "blasphemed the name of God, which

hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.” When another angel poured out his vial upon the beast’s seat and kingdom so that great darkness fell upon the people “they gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.” When great hail fell upon men they “blasphemed God because of the plague of hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great” (Revelation 16.8-11 & 21). Thus, it is plain that troubles sent upon the righteous are more apt to turn them about than troubles sent upon the wicked. Judgments upon the wicked often make clearer how evil they really are, and this fact alone should show how silly they are that argue God would be unjust if He allows men to suffer hell eternally. Why should one reason that it is wrong for God to punish with an everlasting punishment when the men whom He punishes remain everlastingly ungodly?

God also benefits Christendom by giving them a general knowledge of His word. Even the faintest light God sheds upon a nation can help the people to the degree that it is given and can be the basis for a good and orderly society when it is codified into the justice and moral fabric of a nation. Paul wrote: “But we know that the law *is* good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust” (I Timothy 1.8-11). Here it appears the apostle is speaking of the law, not as it affects the Christian life, but as it affects a nation’s culture in subduing evil practices.

Finally, God generally establishes good order in nations by giving them rulers to govern the people. This prevents anarchy. Daniel declared: “he removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (Daniel 2.21). The fact it is God that sets up rulers led Paul to write: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” He taught the “rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil,” and he calls the ruler “the minister of God to thee for good” (Romans 13.1, 3, & 4). Here, he writes of ministers, not in the ecclesiastical sense, but in the political sense. Yes, there are times when rulers are excessively corrupt and cruel but in such cases their authority is usually shortly lived and the fact that some are wicked and ruthless to extreme should not diminish

the fact in our minds that God's appointment of earthly authorities remains the established pattern for social order.

## **Section VI. Final Remarks**

With what light I have I have tried to show God's will embraces everything that is, was, and shall ever be but by ways in which God neither authored sin nor forced His creatures to commit sin; they acting upon their own natural wills. At the same time, I have tried to show He is the efficient cause of every good work in His creatures. Sadly, few today understand and cherish these beliefs. Only a few today do stand firmly against the free will teachings of Arminians and against the conditional, time salvation doctrine of many who call themselves Primitive Baptists. Sadly, these latter folk think how they deal with scripture was how Baptists always dealt with scripture. Of course, it wasn't. These folk feed upon those Primitive Baptists churchmen who at best can go no further back than the mid nineteenth century to delineate two kinds of salvation. There may have been elements among earlier Baptists that did not take kindly to the absolute doctrine but they sure did not go on record teaching what is taught in the conditional camp today. If they would take the time to study what earlier generations held they might find a better way to interpret and relate scripture than to get tied down into the conditional time salvation and the unconditional eternal salvation system of belief. I believe this better way is to understand the Bible to teach that God executes good works in His people by giving them the new birth, by establishing the principle of the life of Christ that abides in them, and by seeing they have knowledge of His word. By the force of these things the believer has the daily experience to visualize predestination but he will usually do so only after first visualizing what he sees he must do in order to obey what the Lord commands. Afterward, he will recognize God's preordained work in him. The fact that the first impulse in his mind is toward what he must do is the mindset that the Lord gives him to direct his daily course and it proves the truth "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2.10).

Further, sadly we acknowledge there are a few who camp among us who feed the flames of the charge our adversaries make against us by agreeing that God indeed is the author of sin. They are a shame to us. They too should examine more closely the intricate parts of the Bible relating to



iniquity and how past brethren stood firmly against this charge leveled against them.

With these words I close this lengthy article.

**-David K. Mattingly**

