

A DISCOURSE UPON THE DECREES OF GOD By
Hercules Collins, 1696
(Contributed by Elder Leroy Rhodes, Cicero, ILL.)

Ephesians 1:11 — "Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will"

Ephesus was a great and rich city, but given much to idolatry: Paul, Appolos and Aquila, preaching the gospel among them, many were brought off from their idolatrous temples and worship, for the Word of God grew mightily, and many believed and were baptized. The idol-worshippers seeing their idolatry like to fall before the Gospel, as Dagon before the Ark, and their craft in danger: the great goddess Diana despised, and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshipped; a great uproar was among them: which when ceased, Paul called the disciples together, embraced them, so went to Macedonia; but left Timothy there, to charge some, they preach no other doctrine than Christ crucified, and not to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying (I Tim. 1:3,4).

The Apostle in the context treating of election, predestination, redemption, justification, adoption, sanctification, and an eternal inheritance; he comes in our text to resolve whence all these flowed; which is from no other fountain that the counsel of God's own will: that those who were by nature children of wrath, walked according to the course of this world, and dictates of the prince of the power of the air, fulfilling the delights of the flesh and of the mind, were without hope, and without God in the world, as to any saving knowledge of Him; that those that were afar off, are made nigh; of strangers, fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of faith; that those who were once idol-worshippers, are now sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, are gracious works in time, flowing from His purposes in eternity, as the Apostle in our text above affirms.

In the words we consider these parts: First, The Agent. Who "God, the Father: "(verse 3). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath chosen us in Him: " that is, as He is the Head, and the Church the body; as He the King, the Church the Kingdom; for Christ, as man is God's Elect (Isa. 42:1), yea, the Head of Election and Predestination: He was fore-ordained to be the Head of a holy, glorious, mystical body; the King of a glorious kingdom, perfect Captain of a glorious company; the Bridegroom of a glorious bride: Yet if He will have this honor, He must purchase it; if He will make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed (Isa. 53:10). He shall be Head of this body, King of this kingdom, Captain of this company, Bridegroom of this bride. Is it likely that this purchase can be capable of losing? Then He may be a King without a kingdom, a Bridegroom without a bride, a Head without a body: but how is this possible?

If He be a Head, He must have a body, if a King, He must have a kingdom, if a Captain, He must have a company; if a Bridegroom, He must have a bride, because relatives: He that is a Father, must have a child; He who is a Husband, must have a wife; or if Christ be a Bridegroom, He must have a bride: If so, where is any room for a total and final fall from true grace? A child cannot cease to be one's child; and if once children, then heirs (Romans 8:17), no fear then of losing the inheritance.

Mark, when it is said, "We are chosen in Christ," we are not to understand, as if the death and merits of Christ were the foundation of election: No, that's from the grace and love of the Father. This is the Fountain from whence election flows; hence the elect are called the Father's (John 17:16), "Thine they were, and Thou gayest them Me." Yet the death of Christ is the foundation of all grace in the Church-militant, and glory in the Church-triumphant (I Thess. 5: 9, 10). The Father from free Sovereign Grace, choose a number out of the world in their fallen state when in misery, and makes them vessels of mercy (Romans 9:23) [a sublapsarian viewpoint – Ed.] But, if Christ will have the honor to be their Lord, He must pay a certain sum for them, no less than His blood; because Justice had said, the man (if he transgressed) should die, either in his person or in a Surety. So here is "Mercy and Truth met together, Righteousness and Peace kiss each other," (Psalm 85:10). Here, the Mercy of the Father meets the Righteousness of the Son; the Mercy of the Father, in providing a Surety to pay and satisfy Himself; the Justice of Christ, in laying down His life. These sweetly agree in order to the everlasting peace of a lost sinner; so that when it's said, "We are chosen in Christ," it intends as He was to be the Head, of the Church the body; as He the King, the Church the kingdom: but not chosen in Christ, as if His death were to merit our election, that was from the Father's love; yet His death is the fountain of all grace in time, and all glory in eternity.

Secondly; The Act, "worketh:" It's not said, He hath wrought, or will, but worketh; signifying, that all the acts of Divine Providence, past, present, and to come, are nothing but the execution of His eternal counsel, purpose and will.

Thirdly; The Universality of it, "all things:" This word, "all things," is not limited to the context; but as if the Apostle should say, "All that I have spoken of before concerning redemption, justification, salvation, and all other acts of Divine Providence, which I have not mentioned, are all according to His eternal purpose, and counsel of His own will.

Fourthly; The manner of the Agent's Act, is "according to the counsel of His own will;" not work according to the counsel of another's will, but of His own. As God took no counsel of man's will in the work of Creation (Isa. 40:13,14), neither does He in the work of salvation: As God wrought according to His own will, and not of man's in the first Creation; so He works according to His own will and counsel, and not man's in the New Creation (Romans 11:34). Of His own will the Child of Grace is begotten, and the Seed of Grace sown, as the Apostle James asserts (James 1:18). If then it be of His own will, 'tis not of man's.

OBSERVATION

All the acts of Divine Providence in time; whether in the Church or the world, are all the effects, products and executions of God's eternal pleasure, purpose, counsel and will. I shall speak to three general heads:

- I. The Demonstration
- II. Speak to some Properties of the Divine Will

III. Draw some Natural Inferences from the Doctrine, with some other uses in the close.

That this doctrine is true appears from the Creation: If God had not first willed and decreed it, it had not been. David's members were written in the book of God's decrees (Psalm 139:16), when as yet there were none of them in being, but in time had a being, by virtue of their having been there written. Yea, our very habitation where we dwell, were beforetime determined and appointed: which doctrine Paul preached to the Athenians on Mar's Hill (Acts 17:26), to bring them off from their idolatry to worship the true God who made Heaven and Earth, and all things therein; and made all nations of one blood, to dwell upon the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitations that they might seek the Lord; so that the time of our being, and the place of our being, is according to God's determination aforetime. Moreover, Pontius Pilate, the Jews, and Gentiles act of crucifying Christ, was the fulfilling of God's counsel, which "He determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27,28). God may be said to be the cause of an action, when no cause of the sin of that action, that ariseth out of the heart, saith our Lord (Matthew 15:19) — "Evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, etc." Everyone will grant, no man can do any sinful acts, as swear and lie with the tongue, steal and murder with the hand, without the power of God concur to uphold and strengthen those organs and members, "For in Him we live and move, and have our being," (Acts 17:28), yet they are not upheld and strengthened for that end, but His glory: but man abuses his physical and natural strength.

God's determination that Christ should die to save man, laid none under a necessity of sinning: but God foreknew in His counsel what the malice of the devil, Jews and Gentiles would be against this Person to put Him to death: And God did determine not to prevent it, but suffer it, because He knew how to bring Glory to Himself out of it. It was necessary Christ should suffer, that God might not be mistaken in His foreknowledge, or come short of His determinate decree. But this neither took away the liberty of Christ's suffering, neither did it take away the liberty of the Jews, and their voluntariness in putting Christ to death. God's decree that Christ should suffer, did infallibly secure the event; but did not annihilate and destroy the liberty of the act, neither in Christ as aforesaid, who freely suffered Himself, nor the Jews, who as freely and voluntarily put Him to death, as if there had been no decree of God at all about His death. The gardener's foreknowledge that such seeds and roots will in the Spring produce such leaves and flowers, is not the cause of their rise and appearance in the Spring; but knowing the virtue of such roots, so concludes: So God's foreknowledge what wicked works would proceed from the root of a wicked heart concerning Christ's death, is no more cause of those evil acts, than the gardener is the cause of the rise of such flowers in Spring from such roots, because he foreknew the nature of them. God's foreknowledge that Adam would fall, put 'him under no necessity of it, but 'twas done voluntarily and freely; yet God foresaw infallibly he would fall, and God determined not to prevent it, knowing how to glorify Himself by it. So God's foreknowledge of the Jews putting Christ to death, did not necessitate them to it, but 'twas done as freely as if it had not been foreknown, nor any determination of God about it. Thus we have proved those acts of Divine Providence in time in the world, are the product of God's eternal purpose.

[Editor's comments: He seemed to have proved otherwise. Collins is using the sublapsarian views in these arguments. Gill was an infralapsarian in his views, while Sike's and the editor of this book are supralapsarian. So in these three articles, you have all three positions presented. You may note, too, that John Gill defended the supralapsarian view when it was attacked by the vicious John Wesley. Infralapsarian lies somewhere between the sublapsarian (after the fall, or lapse) and the supralapsarian (before the fall, or lapse), and apparently agrees with both according to how one is looking at the decree of Adam's fall. A theologian will laugh at this simplicity!]

Now we come to show and demonstrate, that all the gracious acts and providences in the Church are the products and executions of His eternal will. As for the act of effectual vocation (II Timothy 1:9), it is not according to our works (Acts 13:42), but according to His own purpose and grace, which He purposed in Christ before the world began (Ephesians 1:3). That the Gentiles believed in Christ, was because they were "ordained to eternal life;" that the Ephesians were holy, was, because chosen to it, not for it, "before the foundation of the world." The reason why a people are drawn in time to God is because "loved with an everlasting love," (Jeremiah 31:3). The new creation and good works found in the Ephesian Church (Ephesians 2:10), was the pure effect of what God had "before ordained." The hope of eternal life in the saints, is the product of that promise which was made of God, that cannot lie, "before the world began" (Titus 1:2). The sanctification of the Church at Thessalonica, and their belief of the truth (II Thess. 2:13), was in order to that salvation they were chosen and appointed unto "from the beginning" (I Thessalonians 5:0). In a word, our calling, justification, and glorification, are all the effects of God's eternal purpose. This was the doctrine Paul taught the Church of the Romans (Romans 8:28-33), Ephesians, Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus, etc. Christ being manifested in time to the Church, was from His foreordination to it, "before the foundation of the world" (I Peter 1:20). His being slain in time actually, was from the decree in eternity, hence called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world;" not so actually, but in God's decree.

I. To speak to some of the properties of the Divine Will.

1. It's an eternal will; His will is as Himself and habitation, eternal. God's will is not suspended unto time, to see the creatures' will before He wills concerning them; as if man's will were to determine His; as if God could not determine His own will until He saw man's. His counsels are called "counsels of old," (Isa. 25:1), to signify the eternity of them. We poor creatures will in time; but there is no time with Him, all is eternity with Him. His mercy is said, not only to be everlasting, but "from everlasting," (Psalm 103:17). His love is said to be the same; His covenant is an "everlasting covenant," (II Samuel 23:5), as it has no end, so no beginning. The acts of God's will are all one with His will, His will is all one with His essence, His essence is one pure simple act; God is love essentially, Wise essentially. We may have a being, yet be neither good or wise; but God can as soon cease to be, as cease to be either. If there be no Divine will (saith Polbill upon the Divine Decrees), the glass of the Divine Prescience must be broken; because as God knows all essences in His own Essence, all possibles in His own Omnipotency, all congruities and tendencies to His own glory, in His own unsearchable Wisdom; so He

knows all futures in His own eternal will: for all things future were in their own nature but possibles, and could never become future, but by the Divine will; this future of the saints' holiness is from the Divine will, "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

2. The second property of the Divine will, is righteousness: hence His counsels called by the prophet Isaiah, "faithfulness and truth," (Isa. 25:1) called counsels in respect of the wisdom of them, old in respects of the eternity of them, true in respect of the performance of them. Men often will what's unjust, as Ahab Naboth's vineyard, the Jews the death of Christ, though innocent; Pharaoh and Haman, the destruction of the Church: but it is incompatible with the Divine Being, to will anything unrighteous; as Elihu said. (Job 34:10), "Far be it from the Almighty that He should commit wickedness", "The judge of all the earth will do right; " He who takes no pleasure in wickedness, cannot will it. The sanctification of the Thessalonians was the will of God, and that they "should abstain from fornication," (I Thess. 4:3-5). Things may be better said to be just and righteous because God wills them, than will them because they are just and righteous: For God's will is the Rule of Righteousness: "His work is perfect," saith Moses (Deut. 32:4), "for all His ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." When the viols of God's wrath are poured out upon His implacable enemies, it's said, "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." Though the foundation of justification be from the free grace of God the Father; yet in consideration of Christ's paying the sinner's debt, God is said to be just in justifying him which believeth in Jesus. God's willing honor and eternal life to those who by patient continuance in well-doing, and God's willing the wicked to the day of evil, are all according to the holy and righteous will of His nature; and when you cannot comprehend some mysterious providence, still retain Jeremiah's principle, conclude, "God is righteous," (Jeremiah 12:1).

3. A third property of the Divine will, is graciousness. The Ephesians being predestinated unto the adoption of children (Ephesians 6:7) as it was according to the good pleasure of His own will, so also to the "praise of the glory of His grace; " so our redemption and justification is according to the riches of His grace. That a Savior is proclaimed by the angels, in order to man's eternal peace, was from the good will of God. What had become of the burning bush in Egypt, had not the good will of God dwelt in it? This name God has commanded to be proclaimed (Exodus 34:7), "The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin, shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Him," etc. There is a great deal of unmercifulness in sinners' will, as the Devil has a will to destroy all; but blessed be God, who has the great Red Dragon in a chain, his power is not absolute; for though he go up and down the earth seeking souls' destruction (I Peter 5:8), yet it is not whom he will, but whom he may devour. God's will is a gracious will: when He gives His Church Himself in covenant, and all His attributes; His Son and all His offices, and purchased blessings; His Spirit, and all His saving operations: whence can this flow but from the Fountain of Free-grace? Hence 'tis said (Ephesians 2:8), "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

4. A fourth property of the Divine will is immutability. Hence His decrees are compared

to "mountains of brass," (Zech. 6:1,2), which are immovable; with Him is not the least shadow of turning; it is not compatible with Him, whose name is Jehovah, to change; if so, the Church had been destroyed e're now. It's not for want of sin in Jacob they are not destroyed, but because He is Jehovah, and changeth not (Mal. 3:6), neither is it possible He should change, because He perfectly foreknows whatever will come to pass. Indeed men who have not that power, do often will and purpose this and that, and change their mind after, not foreseeing he cause of the change; which if they had, would not have will that which they must undo again, because it's some dishonor to men to be changeable, but "God is not a man that He should repent, (Numbers 23:19). "For the gifts and callings of God are without repentance," (Romans 11:29). When the Scripture speaks about God's repenting He made man (Genesis 6:6), it is not to be understood properly, as if God were capable of repentance, as man is: but it is spoken to our capacity, God is said to repent, when He doth such things as men do when they repent: when God withheld those judgments and effects of His anger He threatened against Ninevah, He is said to repent; so when God lets out His judgment, the effect of His anger upon the old world, God is said to repent: According to our capacity, and man's practice, who when he doth repent of a thing, doth shew it by some visible act. It's because God's compassions fail not, but are ever the same, that the Church is not consumed (Lam. 3:22). Though David's house nor heart was as it should be, yet this was his comfort, God had made with him an everlasting covenant (II Sam. 13:5). God foreknew Israel would be a transgressor from the womb (Isaiah 48:9). Yet for His namesake would defer His anger, and for the praise of His grace would not cut them off. God foreknew Peter's sin, Paul's sin; yet that hindered them not from being "chosen vessels," elect according to the foreknowledge of God (I Peter 1: 1,2). So that whom He once loves, He must love to the end, because there can be nothing hid from Him that might make Him change His mind, as it is often with men. So that we may conclude this with the Apostle, "He who hath begun a good work in you will finish it," (Phil. 1:6).

5. A fifth property of the Divine will is, that it is a Sovereign and Supreme will He hath an absolute freedom of will (Isa. 41:13). If He will work none can let (hinder) Him (Daniel 4:35). "He doeth according to His will in the armies of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, what dost Thou?" (Lam. 3:37) "Who saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?" (Psalm 103:19) "God's kingdom ruleth over all." He has absolute power over men and devils. Hence, "He will be gracious to whom He will be gracious, and He will shew mercy to whom He will shew mercy, and whom He will (after the abuse of much patience) He hardeneth," (Romans 9:18). What reason can be given why Christ must take the human nature to save man, and not the angelic nature to save angels? We must answer as Christ in another case, "Even so Father, for so it pleased Thee, it was Thy will and pleasure." So if God will choose Abel, and pass by Cain; choose Isaac, and pass by Ishmael, choose David and Solomon, and pass by Saul; choose Peter and Paul, and pass by Judas: that some of the natural seed of Abraham are elected, and the rest left in their blindness and hardness: what shall we say in this case, but as Moses and the Apostle, "He will be gracious to whom He will be gracious," (Romans 11:7,8)? If God will convert a profligate sinner, as the thief upon the cross, and take his soul into Paradise the same day, who never gave God a day's service, but a subject of the Black Prince all his days: I say,

if God will give him the same happiness He gives another, who has served and suffered for Him forty years, who shall fault God? May He not do with His own grace and glory what He will? When the Apostle said (Acts 10), "God is no respecter of persons," the meaning of that is, God doth not respect the person of a Jew, because a Jew, more than a Gentile, a Roman; as Peter did suppose, before God showed him otherwise in a vision: then he saw Cornelius, though a Roman or Italian, and no Jew, yet believing in Christ, and working righteousness, was accepted as much as the believing Jew. Yet effectual vocation (calling), and saving faith must always be concluded to be, not according to our works, but God's purpose in election, as the Apostle asserts in Romans 9:16, whether it be a Jew or Gentile, that is called effectually. God's will is a Sovereign Supreme will, yet a righteous will; God's power is suitable to His will: Many will great things against the Church, as the Devil and his kingdom wills the destruction of Christ's Kingdom; but their power is not suitable and adequate as God's is to His will; if He has a mind to open and change such a heart, rescue such a one out of the Devil's power, He can do it. He can carry His will through: God's will is a Sovereign and Supreme will, "For there is none above Him, that He should give an account unto any of His matters," as Elihu said unto Job, when under some discontent about Divine Providence (Job 33:13).

6. A sixth property of the Divine Will, is, That it's a will of perfect Wisdom: Hence counsel is joined with it in the text; it's not a mere will, but a will with a depth of Wisdom. He doth everything, which may render any wise, if it be wisdom to act to a right end; so doth God act all for Himself and His own glory. "As He made, so He ordered all things for Himself" (Proverb 16:4). Moreover He knows and observes all circumstances of actions, all second causes are before God, how they will act, and when, and carries all on in an exact harmony with His Divine will and pleasure. This will is not mere will, but a will guided by the Reason and Counsel of His own Infinite Understanding. We never count a willful man a wise man, but all God's acts are said to be in judgment, and working all things according to counsel. The wisest of men often miscarry in their ideas and contrivances; but God never did miscarry for want of Wisdom in anything; all the wisdom of men and angels is from Him. The Prophet Isaiah, speaking of man's wisdom in plowing, sowing, threshing, "This wisdom cometh from the Lord of Hosts," saith the Prophet, "who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working," (Isa. 28: 24,29). As He made the world in Wisdom, so He governs it: for "He works all after the counsel of His own will."

Use 1. By way of instruction. If God works "all things after the counsel of His own will;" then know that God's purposes are some way or other concerned in Satan's tempting of the best of saints. If Satan could not enter into a herd of swine without Christ's leave, surely he cannot without it disturb one saint; the Devil must have leave from God before he could touch a hair of Job's head; and this is very observable, that Satan generally sets most upon the most holy, and those who bring most glory to God, because he enviyeth their glorifying of Him: this is the chief design of Satan in all your temptations, and the destruction of the soul is his subordinate end. The Devil's assaults are not so much against the weakest as strongest saint; and therefore it is no good inference to conclude, you cannot be a child of God because so much harried, for it's rather an argument you are one of God's choice jewels. David is called "a man after God's own heart," yet he was

often set upon by the Evil one. With Job, God gives him the character of "a perfect and an upright man," yet none more plagued by the Serpent than he. And Satan desires to have Peter in His own power, to sift him as wheat, though one of whom Christ said, "I will build My church" upon that faith of his, wherein he believed Christ to be the Son of God. And Paul, though Christ asserts "he is a chosen vessel," yet he must have a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him. In a word, our dear sinless Savior passed not through the world without Satanical temptations, and some of the worst sort, for he tempted his Maker to worship him. From hence we may not wonder that we sometimes hear the best and strongest saints mourn under temptations, because Satan sets most violently upon them, knowing they are the greatest enemies unto his kingdom of darkness, and most capable to glorify God, and enlarge Christ's Kingdom. Moreover, he knows God will have more dishonor in the fall of one eminent saint, than of many weak ones; hence he sets most upon them by his temptations. And if the saints would be conquerors in times of temptation, they must not deal with Satan by presenting their duties, what they have done, or their own holiness and righteousness; because Satan will find a flaw in the best of yours; but you must always fight him and overcome him with the blood of the Lamb, and His Righteousness, and rather confess thyself a sinner, leaning upon Christ's imputed righteousness, than stand upon anything of thine own, for then Satan will be too hard for thee. O labor to be one of those who come out of great tribulation and temptation, with thy robes washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Use 2. By way of information. Doth God work "all things after the counsel of His own will"? Then we infer this Agent is an independent Being and Worker; If He works "all things after the counsel of His own will," then He doth not depend upon the will of another. Regeneration is not according to "the will of man," but of God (John 1:13), that is, of God's free grace and Divine power; for a child cannot beget itself; he who is dependent upon another's will, cannot do his own, because he depends on another: God depends upon none for Being, Wisdom, Power, Authority to act anything, for "He works all after the counsel of His own will." The work of sanctification spoken of in the context, was the product and effect of God's eternal counsel and will, and not the effect of man's; God's will depends not upon the creature's will: for when He speaks of a new heart, He doth not say, "If the creature will be willing he shall have it," but He speaks like a Monarch (Ezek. 36:26,27), "I WILL take away the heart of stone, I will give a heart of flesh; I will put My Spirit within them, and will cause them to walk in My statutes." I wait not the creature's motion till he be willing; but I will make him willing, in My working all things after the counsel of My own will. If we consider what regeneration is, it will clearly demonstrate God's will doth not depend upon the creature's will in that work at all, because it is a Divine Seed and principle of grace put where there was never any before; so that in regeneration man is wholly passive, and can contribute no more to his being a new creature, than his being a creature; wherever it is wrought, it is the pure product of God's eternal will, and not the creature's: "Of His own will begat He us," (James 1:17). The creature's will doth not determine God's, God's will doth not wait the motion of the creature's will before He determine about him; but "He works all things according to the counsel of His own will: " God works in time according to His own purposes, and not men's purposes, in a way of salvation: "For it is not of him that runneth, nor of him that willeth, but of God that sheweth mercy," (Romans 9:16). It's from the

merciful purpose of God, and not the creature's will, that any are vessels of glory, and that all are not vessels of wrath; so then man's will cannot prevent nor determine God's because "He works all things after the counsel of His own will: " Both the "will and to do" is wrought in the Philippians, according to God's good pleasure, and not according to man's good pleasure (Phil. 2:12,13).

Use 3. Of inferences. If God "works all things after the counsel of His own will;" then we infer, (1) He is irresistible in His will, because He actually works what He wills. In this sense we say with the Apostle (Romans 9:19), "Who bath resisted His will?" that is, His effective and determinative will: indeed God's ordinative revealed commanding will may be rejected; so the Pharisees rejected the counsel of God against themselves, in not being baptized with the baptism of John (Luke 7:30).

So the Jews resisted the Spirit in the doctrine of the prophets (Acts 7:45). So the false prophets in Jeremiah's time are said, "not to stand in the counsel of the Lord, "(Jeremiah 23:22). So we are to understand the prophet Isaiah to the Church, when he saith, "What could God have done more, which He had not done?" (Isa. 5), that is, in respect to His revealed will and external means, but not in respect of internal grace; for all must confess in that respect He could have done more; but in respect of His revealed will and external means, what could have been done more? "He gave His law to Jacob, and His statutes to Israel, He hath not done so by any other nation," (Psa. 147: 19,20). To them was committed the oracles of God (Romans 3:1,2). No nation so great in this respect (Deut. 4:7). But though the ordinative will of God may be resisted, yet His will whereby He hath determined to effect this or that, cannot: for in this sense "He is of one mind, and who can turn Him?" (Job 23:13). This counsel of the Lord shall stand, "whatever devices may be in a man 's heart, " (Prov. 19:21, "this counsel of God shall stand," saith the prophet Isaiah, "and He will do all His pleasure," (Isa. 46:10). We can as soon stop the ebbing and flowing of the ocean, and the sun from going its course, as supercede and put a stop to God in His determinative will. How soon did God change the will of the thief on the cross, when this will of God came to act? Though many strong bars be upon the heart against God, by nature and actions, yet if this be the counsel of His will, "He will work, and none can let Him;" "for He worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will." (2). If "God work all things after the counsel of His own will;" then we refer He must be an Omnipotent and Almighty Operator and Worker; for He works what He has a will to do: He willed the creation of the world, but had He not been Omnipotent, He could never have made all things out of nothing, with only, "Let it be so," (Genesis 1:3). He must be Omnipotent, because He wills that which none but an Omnipotent arm can perform: He willed Christ's and the saints' resurrection, which none but Omnipotency can effect; but God can raise the dead, though none else can. He willed the working of saving faith, the faith of Christ, in the souls of the Ephesians, and the knowledge of the riches of the glory of the saints' inheritance:

But the Apostle saith (Ephesians 1:18-20), "No less power can effect it, than that which raised Christ from the dead;" which is set forth by several graduations, he called it "power, great power, mighty power, exceeding greatness of His power, in them who believe according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when

He raised Him from the dead." And as by a mighty power, saints are put into a state of grace so they are kept in that state by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation (I Peter 1:5). This was the doctrine and the experience of the Apostle Peter; He is able to keep you from falling, in respect of His Omnipotency; and willing, in respect of His purpose: "For He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." It's His purpose and will to overthrow mystical Babylon (Rev. 20:6), but it could not be done, if God were not Omnipotent, and reigned over her. Omnipotency, as 'twas required in the first creation, so also in the second. Omnipotency brought light into a dark world, and the same brings Divine Light into a dark heart. Can less than Omnipotency raise and quicken a dead body from the grave? No less power is required to quicken one dead in trespasses and sins; thus the Ephesians were quickened according to the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:1,2). (3). If God work "all things after the counsel of His own will:" From hence we infer God's Prescience and Foreknowledge; if whatever comes to pass, cometh to pass because it is the "counsel of His own will," then He must needs foreknow all things: "For known unto God are all His work from the beginning of the world," (Acts 15:18). If there can be nothing come to pass but what He hath determined, then He must of necessity foreknow whatever comes to pass. This is an incommunicable property of the Divine Being. When Jehovah would debase all false gods, He interrogates their worshippers, if they could declare things to come to pass as He could? (Isa. 41:26), "Who hath declared from the beginning, that we may know? And before time, that we may say, He is righteous?" The true God "declares the end from the beginning," (Isa. 46:10), therefore He must foreknow whatever comes to pass. And albeit God did not decree sin, as sin, to be in the world, because contrary to His Nature; yet He decreed to permit it, knowing how to bring glory to Himself out of it, else would never have permitted it.

Now if God foreknow all things, then He cannot be disappointed in anything, as man is, who knoweth not what shall be on the morrow (Prov. 27:1). Hence when the Scripture saith, "God looked for grapes, and behold wild grapes," (Isa. 5:2), it is not to be understood, as if God were disappointed as man is, who sometimes looks for one thing, but behold another occurs which he looked not for, nor foreknew anything of. But it's written thus, to shew what God might justly expect from that people, considering the means and mercies were bestowed on them: But 'tis not compatible with Jehovah to be frustrated in His expectations as man is, "He declares the end from the beginning," He foreknew infallibly who would be saved, and who would miscarry, before He made man; notwithstanding all the means afforded, God foresaw many thousands would perish. Yet let none say, If so, why did God make man? O have a care of thy thoughts! (Romans 9:19-23). "Who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that form it, Why hast Thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God willing to shew His wrath, and make His power known, endured with much longsuffering, the vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction? And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory." God foreknow the defects of the elect, who are, saith Peter: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God," (I Peter 1:1,2), yet that did not hinder them from being vessels prepared afore to glory. If all things in time come to pass according to His eternal will, then He must needs foreknow all things, seeing He could not be ignorant of His own will; So He worketh in

time "all things after the counsel of His own will" in eternity. (4). If God works in the world, and in the Church, "all things after the counsel of His own will; then we may infer God's Immensity and Infinite Presence. He must be in all places, if He works in all places, nothing is more clear than that! He fills Heaven and Earth with His Presence (Jeremiah 23: 23-24). He is in the world in the way of providence, in Heaven most glorious, in Hell in His power and Justice; God is in every place, and totally in every place, not a part of God in one place, and a part in another. Neither is God like earthly kings, who can be but in one place at one time, in person, and act in other nations by their representatives; but God is personally present in every place (Psa. 139:7-9), how else could He work all things for the best to them who love God, and "work all things after the counsel of His own will"? He who is of an Infinite Being, must be of an Infinite Presence; this must be, because He hath promised His Presence to the Church to the end of the world: therefore He must be with them in all places of the world, or else cannot make good His Word. God's power is everywhere, therefore Himself: For Himself and attributes are all one: It is not enough to say, God knows all things in the world, as one upon a high mountain may see what is under him; But God is everywhere personally present; as David saith, "Whither can we go from Thy presence?" God is everywhere inclusively, nowhere exclusively: hence David would cry unto God from the ends of the earth (Psa. 61:2), believing God would work all things after the counsel of His own will, for the answering the saints' prayers is according to His purpose. (5). Doth God work all things after the counsel of His own will? Then we infer, that all those things we call casual, fortuitous, accidental, chance, are all the products of the counsel of His will: if that we call chance, be things, it must be some of those "all things" in the text which God worketh; that which we call casual, accidental, in the way of second causes, are all ordered by the first Cause.

"A man cuts down a tree, the head slips off the helve (axe) and gives his neighbor a mortal wound," though done not designedly, but "accidentally" by the man; yet the text saith, "God delivered him into his hand," (Deut. 19:5 compared with Exo. 21:12,13). As for the periods of preservation, they are all fixed on the Divine decrees; there the days of men are determined, their months numbered, and their impassable bounds appointed, as Job saith (Job 14:5). Hezekiah had 15 years added to his days; but there was no addition to the Divine decree. Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days, yet they live out all the days set down by the Divine decree. The Jews, though they had great malice against Christ, could not kill Him until His time was come; rain nor drought, fruitfulness, barrenness, riches, nor poverty, health nor sickness, prosperity nor adversity, life nor death, come not upon us by "chance", but according to the counsel of His own will. Divine Providence extends itself to all persons, things, places and times: This Job knew, he saw God in the loss of his estate and children (Job 1:20,21). Though God made use of the Sabeans and Chaldeans as instruments, yet he looked beyond the second causes to the first Cause. David was dumb under very severe providences, from this principle (Psa. 39:9). God's Divine Providence extends itself to the lion, unicorn, whale, raven, hail, snow; as God tells Job (Job 38, 39, 40, 41). Yea, the fall of a sparrow, nor a hair, is without it: If our hairs are all numbered, much more our years, if a sparrow cannot fall without it, much less a child, a man! That which is "casual" to us, is all ordered by God in infinite Wisdom: Many things fall upon us we never dreamed of, but nothing comes to

pass but what God did foreknow; and whatever second causes God may make use of, it is all to bring about the will of the first Cause. Joseph's selling unto Egypt, Shimei's cursing of David, Ahab's going up to Ramoth Gilead, the arrow entering between the harness, though shot at "a venture," was disposed of by God, and had its commission to give him his death wound. The change of government we are under is God's working, according to the counsel of His own will: (Psa. 75:6,7), "For promotion cometh not from the East nor West, North nor South; but God putteth down one and setteth up another." The great reason there are so many discontented under general and particular providences, is, because they overlook the Finger of God in it; always quarreling with second causes, not considering "God worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."

**Some Considerations To Quiet Any Under Trials,
In Order To Their Patient Submitting to,
And Cheerful Doing of The Divine Will.**

First, consider, who can govern the world better than He who made it? Who can dispose of His creatures better than He who gave them a being? Who can tell how to keep a house or watch in order, better than He who made them? Shall magistrates acquire the name of wise governors, and shall not the Governor of the world, who is essentially Wise, be so accounted in His "working all things after the counsel of His own will"? Who is fitter to govern the world than He who made it? This was the very argument God stilled Job withal, (Job 38-42). "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Hadst thou no hand in making the world, and wouldest thou a hand in governing it? Am I not able to govern and dispose of My creatures by the same wisdom I made them? Did I take no counsel of man in framing it, and shall I come to man for wisdom to govern it? Had I no counsel of man when I made My decrees, and shall I now come to man for wisdom to execute them, when it's My own glory to "work according to the counsel of My own will"?

Secondly, consider, God takes pleasure in all His purposes and decrees; as God's counsels will stand, because immutable, so His counsels are called "His pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). God's electing, redeeming, adopting, sanctifying, saving the Ephesians, is called "the good pleasure of His will: " that wherein He took delight, or was well-pleasing to Him (Ephesians 1:5). Shall God take pleasure in His decrees, and the execution of them, and shall we not be pleased with what God is pleased withal? Shall we cheerfully submit to the just decrees, will and pleasure of earthly governors, and not to Him whose "Kingdom rules over all" (Psa. 103:19)? All good men do delight in their own just decrees and purposes, and shall not God in His, who cannot go out of Himself or His own purposes to a greater Good, because He is the chief Good? If it do please God to make you His people (I Samuel 12:22), and for your profit is pleased to correct you (Hebrews 12:10), shall we not say, "Blessed be God" for the one, as for the other (Job 1:21)? Although it is too low for a Christian to say, I must submit; it's the glory of the Christian to choose the Divine will. Reprobates and devils must submit. If God will dispossess a poor sinner of the Devil, he must come out, will he, nil he! Pharaoh indeed obeyed God's will in letting Israel go; but it was sore against his will! A believer should submit to the Divine will out of choice, not force, that's no more than devils and reprobates do: Herein Christ is our

Pattern, though the human flesh did sometimes recoil and draw back under the sense of approaching trouble, as good men sometimes do; yet His judgment and will was for complying with the Divine will, though it was to die, (Luke 22:42), not only from the eternal transaction between the Father and Himself, about man's salvation, but knowing it was best to choose the will of such a One who is not only righteous, holy and good, but can "work all things after the counsel of His own will"

Thirdly, consider, Divine content ariseth alone from this principle: Am I content with this revolution, {reference to the reformation during the reign of the Protestant prince, William of Orange, 1688-1702} this alteration in the nation, in my family, my person, in my estate, because it is my Lord's will? So Paul could never be content in every condition, but from this principle, knowing not only that the condition he should be in was best for him, but that it was also according to the purpose of God's own will (Philippians 4:11). Some heathens, called Stoics, labored after contentment in every condition, from the improvement of natural principles: but that was far from Divine contentment, God's content and satisfaction ariseth out of Himself and His decrees, knowing Himself perfect: Now when our content is Divine, it flows from this principle purely, and abstract from all other considerations, this is the Divine will, therefore I submit, and therefore am content, and can do no other but choose it, because it is the will of One who is perfect in Wisdom. Lord, if Thou shouldst refer any case to me, to make my own choice, I would refer it to Thee again, and say as the brethren of Berea and Thessalonica, concerning Paul whom they loved dearly, and shed so many tears for at parting, "The will of the Lord be done."

**Fourthly, consider, all in God, and all about God, serves to bring
about His decrees and eternal counsel.**

First, all in God, if I may so express it, all the attributes of God are concerned in the accomplishment of His will; His will decrees all, His Wisdom orders all, His Truth and Power accomplisheth all. Mark, God's Power acts not beyond His Purpose: though in point of power, God could do many things more than He doth, and prevent many things that come to pass; yet in point of His decree, cannot: In point of power God could prevent those garments rolled in blood in the nations of the world, and many family, relative, personal afflictions upon us, and upon His Churches; yet in point of His decree cannot: The Power of God is active, one while to accomplish His will (Acts 17:24), and at another time ceaseth to act, to bring about the Divine purpose: If God withdrew His Power from a creature, he quickly ceaseth to move; and if God do send forth His Spirit, we are created (Psa. 104:29,30). Some may say, I committeth my near relation, husband, wife, or child, into God's hand, with a firm belief God could raise them up; and yet they died: Soul, thou didst well to believe in God's Power. But would you have God act His Power contrary to, or in the preventing His decrees? Remember God's Power acts not beyond His decrees, but all in God, either in a way of action or cessation from act, serves to bring about His own eternal, unchangeable will.

**Secondly, all about God serves to complete His Divine purposes and
decrees.**

I mean the holy saints and angels in glory (Psa. 103:20). "They do His commands hearkening unto the voice of His Word " The spirit of the living creatures, and the wheels, went in Ezekiel's vision, wherever the Spirit of God went for to accomplish His will: So the four spirits or chariots in Zechariah's vision (Zech. 6:104), which came out from between the mountains of brass, the immutable decrees of God, these are all employed in the four quarters of the world, to accomplish those eternal decrees; so that whatever providences they were employed about, whether frowning providences, toward the enemies of God and His Church, signified by the red and black horses, or mixed providences signified by the grizzled and bay horses, some mercy and some affliction; or whether smiling providences upon the Church, signified by the white horses in the third chariot, these all serve to accomplish the immutable decrees of God: And seeing none shall enter the Holy Place "but he which doth the will of the Father," (Matthew 7:21), let it be our daily cry, "Lord help me to do Thy will on earth, as it is done in Heaven," (Matthew 6:10). To suffer patiently, and do cheerfully the will of God upon the earth, is a very great resemblance of the Heavenly life; there is nothing in Heaven, but the Divine will done and delighted in. The angels which are in chains of darkness, their hearts did no sooner rise against the Divine will, but were cast out of the airy Heaven into Hell; and all such as obey not the gospel of Christ, can expect no less than flaming fire (II Thess. 1:8). Is it fit a King should entertain a company of rebels, which continually oppose his will?

Let such remember, as God hath Power and Goodness enough to fix the godly and obedient in everlasting bliss, so He hath Power and Justice enough to fix the disobedient in complete misery. Remember, O disobedient soul! "He can work all things according to the counsel of His own will. Will you not tremble at His presence, who appointed the sand for the bound of the sea?" (Jeremiah 5:22). "Who knows the power of His anger?" (Psa. 90:11). Whoever hardeneth himself against God, and prosper? Who but one lunatic would oppose the joint commands of a general, whose army is an hundred thousand strong, that can crush him as a moth? Oh! What armies in Heaven and earth can God raise against an impenitent sinner, an army of angels, stars, lice, frogs, caterpillars, locusts; yea, God can arm thy own conscience against thee, which is more than all. Provoke not this Lord to jealousy: Are you greater than He, who can destroy soul and body in Hell? Rather labor to "make peace with Him, and you shall make peace with Him," (Isa. 27:5).

Finally, Doth "God work all things after the counsel of His own will"? Then "blessed is the nation, whose God is the Lord, and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance, because the counsel of the Lord standeth forever, and the thoughts of His heart to all generations," (Psalm 33:11,12).

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