

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY By Dr JOHN GILL

BOOK I

Chapter 11

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Book 1, Chapter II, Of The Will Of God, And The Sovereignty Of It, By Dr John Gill



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OF THE WILL OF GOD AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF IT

Having considered the attributes of God which belong to his understanding, as an intelligent Spirit, his knowledge and wisdom, I now proceed to consider his Will, and the sovereignty of it. And shall,

1. Prove that there is a Will in God; for in all intelligent beings there is a will, as well as an understanding; as in angels and men, so in God; as he has an understanding which is infinite and unsearchable; so he has a will, to do what he knows is most fitting to be done. His understanding influences and guides his will, and his will determines all his actions; and his will being thus wisely directed, is called, “the counsel of his will” (Eph. 1:11). A will is frequently ascribed to God in Scripture; “The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14). “Who has resisted his will” (Rom. 9:19). “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will”, (Eph. 1:9) and in many other places; the will of God is no other than God himself willing; it is essential to him; it is his nature and essence; it is not to be separated, or to be considered as distinct from it, or as a part of it, of which it is composed; which would be contrary to the simplicity of God; or to his being a simple, uncompounded Spirit; which has been established. Will is ascribed to each of the divine persons; to the Father, (John 6:39, 40) to the Son, as a divine person, (John 5:21, 17:24) and who also, as man, has a will distinct from that, though subjected to it,

(John 6:38; Luke 22:42) and to the Spirit, who is said to forbid, and not to suffer some things to be done; that is, to not allow them; and to not allow is an act of the will, as well as to will, (Acts 16:6, 7) and he is said to divide his gifts to each man, as he “will” (1 Cor. 12:11). And these three, as they are the one God, they agree in one, in one mind and will.

2. I shall next show what the will of God is: there is but one will in God; but for our better understanding it, it may be distinguished. I shall not trouble the reader with all the distinctions of it made by men; some are false, and others vain and useless; such as into absolute and conditional, antecedent and consequent, effectual and ineffectual, &c. the distinction of the “secret” and “revealed” will of God has generally obtained among sound divines; the former is properly the will of God, the latter only a manifestation of it. Whatever God has determined within himself, whether to do himself, or to do by others, or to suffer to be done, while it is in his own breast, and is not made known by any event in providence, or by prophecy, that is his secret will; such are the deep things of God, the thoughts of his heart, the counsels and determinations of his mind; which are impenetrable to others; but when these open, by events in providence, or by prophecy, then they become the revealed will of God. God’s secret will becomes revealed by events in providence, whether it be considered general or special; the general providence of God, with respect to the world and church, is no other than the execution, and so the manifestation of his secret will, with respect to both: to the world, its production, the origin of nations, the settlement of them in the various parts of the world; the rise of states and kingdoms, and particularly the four monarchies, and the succession of them: to the church, in the line of Seth, from Adam, and in the line of Shem, from Noah, and in the people of Israel, from Abraham, to the coming of Christ: and the book of Revelation is a discovery of the secret will of God with respect to both, from the coming of Christ to the end of the world; the greatest part of which has been fulfilled, and the rest will be; as the destruction of antichrist, and the antichristian states; the conversion of the Jews, and the bringing in of the fulness of the Gentiles; and the spiritual and personal kingdom of Christ. These are now already revealed, though the time when they will take place is still in the secret will of God. The providence of God may be considered as special with respect to particular persons; there is a purpose or secret will of God, with respect to every man; and there is a time fixed for every purpose; a time to be born, and a time to die; and for everything that befalls men between their birth and death: all which open in time, in providence; and what was secret becomes revealed: so we know that we are born, who our parents, the time and circumstances of our birth, as related

to us; we know what has befallen us, whether in an adverse or prosperous way; God has performed what is appointed for us, as Job says of himself; but then, as he observes, “many such things are with him”, in his secret will. We know not what shall befall us; and though we know that we shall die, that is revealed; but when and where, in what manner and circumstance, we know not; that remains in the secret will of God. Some things which belong to the secret will of God become revealed by prophecy; so it was made known to Abraham, that his seed, according to the secret will or purpose of God, should be in a land, not theirs, four hundred years, and be afflicted, and come out with great substance: nor did God hide from Abraham what he secretly willed to do, in destroying Sodom and Gomorrah: and, indeed, it has been usual for the Lord to do nothing but what he reveals to his servants the prophets; particularly all things concerning Christ, his incarnation, offices, obedience, sufferings, and death, and the glory that should follow, were all signified beforehand, to the prophets, by the Spirit of Christ in them. The will of God, which he would have done by men, is revealed in the law, that is called “his will” (Rom. 2:18). This was made known to Adam, by inscribing it on his heart, whereby he knew his duty to God, to be performed by him; this, though sadly obliterated by sin, yet there are some remains of it in the Gentiles, who do by nature the things contained in it; which show the work of the law written in their hearts: a new edition of this law was delivered to the Israelites, written on tables of stone, by the finger of God; according to which they were to behave themselves, and hold the tenure of the land of Canaan, and enjoy the privileges of it: and in regeneration the law of God is put into the inward parts, and written on the hearts of God’s people; who being transformed, by the renewing of their minds, come to know what is the good, perfect, and acceptable will of God (Rom. 12:2). This respects man’s duty both to God and men.

There is the revealed will of God in the Gospel; which respects the kind intentions, and gracious regards of God to men; and discovers what before was his secret will concerning them; as, that he has chosen some to everlasting life and happiness; that he has appointed these to salvation by Christ; and appointed him to be their Saviour; that Christ undertook to do this will of God, and came from heaven to earth to do it, and has finished it; and that it is the will of God that these should be regenerated and sanctified; and “that they should never perish, but have everlasting life” (Eph. 1:4, 5; John 6:38; 1 Thess. 4:3; John 6:39, 40; Matthew 18:14). But then, though all this is the revealed will of God, in the Gospel, yet as to particular persons interested herein, it is, in a great measure, a secret; election of God, and so the rest, may be known by the Gospel coming with power into the heart, and

by a work of grace upon it; and the knowledge of it should be sought after; yet it is not attained to but by such who are favoured with a full assurance of faith; and as to others, though it may, in a judgment of charity, because of their declared experiences, their savoury discourses, and holy conversation, be concluded of them, that they are the elect of God, &c. yet it cannot be certainly known, but by divine revelation, as it might be by the apostle, that Clement, and other fellow labourers of his, had their names written in the book of life (Phil. 4:3). It is the revealed will of God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust; and that all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that after death there will be a judgment; and though it is revealed, that a day is fixed, as well as a person appointed to judge the world in righteousness; yet “of that day and hour knows no man”; no, not the angels; but God only. So that, on the whole, though there is some foundation for this distinction of the secret and revealed will of God, yet it is not quite clear; there is a mixture, part of the will of God is, as yet, secret, and part of it revealed, with respect to the same subject, as what has been observed plainly shows.

The most accurate distinction of the will of God, is into that of precept and purpose; or the commanding and decreeing will of God.

God’s will of precept, or his commanding will, is that which is often spoken of in Scripture; as what should be done by men, and which is desirable they might have knowledge of, and be complete in (Matthew 7:21, 12:50; Col. 1:9, 4:12). This is the rule of mens’ duty; which consists of the fear of God, and keeping his commands; this is done but by a few, and by none perfectly; every sin is a transgression of it; when it is done aright it is done in faith, from love, and to the glory of God: every good man desires to do it in the best manner, and, if it could be, perfectly; even as it is done by angels in heaven. God, by the declaration of this his will, shows what he approves of, and what is acceptable to him, when done aright; and is made to render men inexcusable that do it not, and to make it appear right in justice to inflict punishment on such persons.

The decreeing will of God is only, properly speaking, his Will; the other is his Word: this is the rule of his own actions; he does all things in heaven and earth after his will, the counsel of it; and this will is always done, cannot be resisted, frustrated, and made void; he does whatever he wills; “his counsel stands, and the thoughts of his heart are to all generations”; and this is sometimes fulfilled by those who have no regard to his will of precept, and have no knowledge of this, even while they are doing it; as Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Jews and Gentiles, in doing what they did against Christ, (Acts 4:27, 28) and the ten kings, into whose hearts God put it to fulfil his

will, in giving their kingdoms to the beast, (Rev. 17:17) and this will of God should be bore in mind in everything we intend to do or go about; saying, if the Lord will, we will do this, and that, and the other, (1 Cor. 4:19; James 4:13-15) and this should be owned and acknowledged, and submitted to in every state and condition of life, whether of prosperity or adversity, or in whatsoever befalls us in our own persons, or in our friends and relations, (Acts 21:14) and this, properly speaking, is the one and only will of God. I shall next inquire,

III. What are the objects of it.

First, God himself, not his Being, perfections, and modes of subsisting; as the paternity of the Father; the generation of the Son; and the breathing of the Spirit. These naturally and necessarily exist, and do not depend upon the will of God: but it is his own glory; “The Lord hath made all things for himself”; that is, for his own glory (Prov. 16:4). He wills his own glory in all he does; as “all things are of him”, as the efficient Cause; and “through him”, as the wise Disposer of them; so they are “to him”, to his glory, as the final Cause, and last end of all; and this he wills necessarily; he cannot but will his own glory; as “he will not give his glory to another”; he cannot will it to another; that would be to deny himself.

Secondly, All things without himself, whether good or evil, are the objects of his will, or what his will is some way or other concerned in: there is a difference, indeed, between the objects of God’s knowledge and power and the objects of his will; for though he knows all things knowable, in his understanding, and his power reaches to all that is possible, though not made; yet he wills not all things willable, if the word may be allowed, or that might be willed; wherefore, as Amesius observes, though God is said to be omniscient and omnipotent, yet not omnivolent or all willing.

1st, All good things.

1. All things in nature; all things are made by him, and all were originally good that were made by him, even “very good”; and all were made according to his will; “Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure”; or by thy will, “they are and were created”, (Rev. 4:11) even the heavens, earth, and sea, and all that in them are.

2. All things in providence. God’s kingdom of providence rules over all, and extends to all creatures, angels and men, and every other, and to all events that befall them; not a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of God; “He doth according to his will in the army of heaven”; in the heavenly host of angels; “and among the inhabitants of the earth”, (Dan. 4:35) there is nothing comes to pass but what God has willed, ordered, and appointed; “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it

not?” (Lam. 3:37).

3. All things in grace are according to the will of God, all spiritual blessings in Christ, all grace given to the elect Christ, before the world was; the choice of them in Christ; predestination to adoption by him; redemption through his blood; regeneration, sanctification, and the eternal inheritance; all are according to the good pleasure of his will (2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:3-5, 7, 9, 11; James 1:18; 1 Thess. 4:3).

Secondly, All evil things are the objects of God’s will; which are of two sorts.

1. “*Malum poenae*”, the evil of afflictions; whether in a way of chastisement, or of punishment: if in a way of chastisement, as they are to the people of God, they are according to the will of God; they do not spring out of the dust, nor come by chance; but are by the will, order, and appointment of God; as to quality, quantity, duration, ends, and uses, (Job 23:14; Mic. 6:9; 1 Thess. 3:3) and which are consistent with the justice, holiness, wisdom, love, and goodness of God. If they are in a way of punishment, as they are to wicked and ungodly men; there is no reason to complain of them, since they are less than their sins deserve; and not at all unworthy of a righteous God to will to inflict on them, (Lam. 3:39) all judgments, calamities, and distresses, which come upon kingdoms, nations, cities, towns, and particular persons, are all of God, and according to his will (Amos 3:6). Not that God wills these things for the sake of them; or as taking delight in the afflictions and miseries of his creatures, (Lam. 3:33; Ezek. 18:32) but for the sake of some good: the afflictions of his people are for their spiritual good, as well as for his own glory: and the punishment of the wicked is for the glorifying of his justice.

2. There is “*malum culpa*”, or the evil of fault and blame, that is sin: about this there is some difficulty how the will of God should be concerned in it, consistent with his purity and holiness: that the will of God is some way or other concerned with it is most certain; for he either wills it or not wills it: the latter cannot be said, because nothing comes to pass, God not willing it, (Lam. 3:37) or he neither wills it, nor not wills it; that is, he has no care about it, nor concern at all with it; and so it is outside the area of jurisdiction, and not within the reach of his providence; which cannot be admitted, and which none will say, but those who are atheistically inclined (see Ezek. 9:9; Zep. 1:12). Besides, as Beza, and other divines argue, unless God had voluntarily permitted sin to be, there could be no display, neither of his punitive justice, nor of his mercy: to which may be added, that God’s foreknowledge of sin most fully proves his will in it; that God foreknew sin would be, is certain; as the fall of Adam; since he made a provision, in Christ, for the saving of men out of it, before it was; and so other sins (see 2

Sam. 12:11, 16:22). Now certain and immutable foreknowledge, such as the foreknowledge of God, is founded upon some certain and immutable cause; which can be no other than the divine will; God foreknows, certainly, that such and such things will be; because he has determined in his will they shall be. To set this affair in the best light, it will be proper to consider, what is in sin, and relative to it: there is the act of sin, and there is the guilt of sin, which is an obligation to punishment, and the punishment itself. Concerning the two last there can be no difficulty; that God should will that men that sin should become guilty; be reckoned, accounted, and treated as such; or lie under obligation to punishment; nor that he should will the punishment of them, and appoint and foreordain them to it for it (Prov. 16:4; Jude 1:4). The only difficulty is, about the act of sin; and this may be considered either as natural or moral; or the act, and the ataxy, disorder, irregularity, and vitiosity of it: as an action, barely considered, it is of God, and according to his will; without which, and the concurrence of his providence, none can be performed; he is the fountain and source of all action and motion; in him all live, move, and have their being, (Acts 17:28) but then the vitiosity and irregularity of it, as it is an aberration from the law of God, and a transgression of it, is of men only; and God cannot be said to will this; he forbids it, he abhors and detests it; he takes no pleasure in it; he is of purer eyes than even to behold it with approbation and delight. God cannot will it as sin, or for the sake of itself; but for the sake of some good to be brought about through it; as the fall of Adam, for the glorifying of his justice and mercy, in punishing some of his posterity, and saving others: the sin of Joseph's brethren selling him into Egypt, for the good of Joseph and his father's family, and others; and the sin of the Jews, in crucifying Christ, for the redemption and salvation of men. And besides, God may will one sin as a punishment for another; as it is most certain he has in the case of the Israelites, (Hosea 4:9, 10, 13) of the heathen philosophers, (Rom. 1:28) and of the papists (2 Thess. 2:9-12). Once more, though God may be said, in such senses, to will sin, yet he wills it in a different way than he wills that which is good; he does not will to do it himself, nor to do it by others; but permits it to be done; and which is not a bare permission, but a voluntary permission; and is expressed by God's "giving" up men to their own hearts' lusts, and by "suffering" them to walk in their own sinful ways, (Ps. 81:12; Acts 14:16) he wills it not by his effective will, but by his permissive will; and therefore cannot be chargeable with being the author of sin; since there is a wide difference between doing it himself, and doing it by others, or ordering it to be done, which only can make him the author of sin; and voluntarily permitting or suffering it to be done by others. I proceed to consider,

IV. The nature and properties of the will of God. And,

First, It is natural and “essential” to him; it is his very nature and essence; his will is himself willing; and therefore there can be but one will in God; for there is but one God, whose nature and essence is one; for though there are three persons in the Godhead, there is but one undivided nature common to them all, and so but one will: they are one, and they agree in one; God is “in one mind”, or will; though there may be distinctions of his will, and different objects of it, and divers ways in which he wills, yet it is by one single eternal act of will he wills all things. Hence also his will is incommunicable to a creature; the will of God cannot otherwise be a creature’s, but as that they approve of it, acquiesce in it, and submit unto it; even it was incommunicable to the human nature of Christ, though taken into union with the person of the Son of God; yet his divine will, and his human will, are distinct from each other, though the one is subject to the other (John 6:38; Luke 22:42).

Secondly, The will of God is “eternal”, as may be concluded from the attribute of “eternity”; for if God is eternal, as he certainly is, even from everlasting to everlasting God, then his will must be eternal, since it is his nature and essence: and from his “immutability”; who changes not, and with whom there is no shadow of turning; but if any new will arises in God in time, which was not in eternity, there would be a change in him; he would not be the same in time he was in eternity; nor the same in eternity he is in time; whereas, he is the same yesterday, today, and for ever: and from the “foreknowledge” of God, which is eternal; “Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world”, or from eternity, (Acts 15:18) and now as God’s foreknowledge arises from his will, God foreknows what will be, as has been observed, because he has determined, in his will, what shall be; so if his knowledge is eternal, his will must be eternal. Likewise, this may be illustrated by the decree of “election”; that was, certainly, before men had done either good or evil; was from the beginning, or from everlasting; even before the foundation of the world, (Eph. 1:4) and as the decree and determination of the will of God was so early, the same may be concluded of all others: add to all which, the will of God is concerned with “all things” that have been “from the beginning” of the world, now are, or shall be to the end of it; and therefore must be prior to the existence of the world, and things in it; and if prior to them, then prior to time; and if prior to time, must be eternal; for we know of nothing before time but what is eternal.

Thirdly, The will of God is “immutable”: immutability is expressly ascribed to the counsel of God; that is, to the will and purpose of God, (Heb. 6:17) and may be established from the attribute of “immutability”; for if God is unchangeably the same, as he is, then his will must be the same, since it is

his nature and essence: a change is made in the will of a creature, either by beginning to will what it did not before, or by ceasing to will what it has willed: now the cause of beginning a new will, or willing what it did not, supposes previous ignorance of the thing now begun to be willed; not knowing the fitness and propriety of it, being ignorant of its nature, excellence, and utility; for of an unknown thing there can be no desire and will: but such a change of will can never take place in God, on such a footing; since it is not only contrary to his eternity and immutability, but to his knowledge, whose understanding is infinite: or a creature changes its will, when it ceases to will what it has willed; which is either of choice, or of obligation to it; of choice, when something unforeseen occurs, which causes it to change its will, and take another course: but nothing of this kind can befall God, before whom all things are at once and together, naked and open; even from all eternity: or else of force, being obliged unto it, because it cannot accomplish its will, and therefore drops it, and takes another course: "But who hath resisted his will", the will of God, so as to cause him to cease from it, and drop it? If God changes his will, it must be either for the better or the worse; and either way it would betray imperfection in him, and want of wisdom;

God may change his outward dispensations of things, but he never changes his will: repentance attributed to him is no proof of it; "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" his will is not to be turned nor altered, no not by the prayers of his people. But of these things see more under the attribute of "immutability", before treated of.

Fourthly, The will of God is always efficacious; there are no wishes, would-bes, or feeble degrees of volition in God; his will is always effected, never made null and void; he does whatever he pleases, or wills; his counsel always stands, and he ever does his pleasure; otherwise he would not be almighty, as he is: it must be for want of power, if his will is not fulfilled, which cannot be said; as he is omnipotent, so is his will; yea, Austin calls it, his most omnipotent will: if this was not the case, there would be somewhat, or some one "superior" to him; whereas he is God over all, the most High, higher than the highest; and can never be contradicted by any: and was his will ineffectual, he would be "frustrated" and disappointed of his end: but as nothing comes to pass which man says, and the Lord commands it not; so everything the Lord says, wills, and orders, most certainly comes to pass; "For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?" yea, he hath sworn, saying, "Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, it shall stand" (Isa. 14:24, 27). Besides if his will was not efficacious, or it failed of accomplishment, he would not be happy: when a man's will is ineffectual, and he cannot accomplish it, it gives him uneasiness,

it makes him unhappy; but this can never be said of God, who is the blessed, the blessed God, blessed forevermore.

Fifthly, The will of God has “no cause” out of himself; for then there would be something prior to him, and greater and more excellent than he; as every cause is before its effect, and more excellent than that; and his will would be dependent on another, and so he not be the independent Being he is: nor can there be any impulsive or moving cause of his will; because there is in him no passive power to work upon; he is purely act, “actus simplicissimus”, a pure, active Spirit: if he consisted of act and power, he would not be the simple and uncompounded Spirit he is; wherefore, to be impelled or moved by any cause, would be contrary to his simplicity, before established: he may indeed be said to will one thing for another; but then that which he wills for another, is no moving cause of his will; these may have the nature of cause and effect between themselves; but neither of them the cause of the will of God; nor is there any final cause of what he wills and does but his own glory; and it would be madness to seek for a cause of his willing that: and from this property of the will of God, it may be clearly discerned, that foreseen faith, holiness, and good works, cannot be the cause of God’s will in the election of any to eternal life; and so the contrary, no cause of his will in the rejection of others.

Sixthly, The will of God, for this same reason, is not conditional; for then it would be dependent on the condition to be performed; and not the will of God, but the performance of the condition, would be the first and chief in the attainment of the end thereby. And, to say no more, if, for instance, God willed to save all men conditionally; that is, on condition of faith and repentance; and to damn them if these conditions are wanting; who does not see that this conditional will, to save and to destroy, is equally the same? destruction is equally willed as salvation; and where is the general love of God to men, so much talked of? there is none at all to any.

Seventhly, The will of God is most free and sovereign; as appears,

1. From the making of the world, and all things in it. That the world is eternal, few have asserted; that it was made, and the scriptures assert, (Rev. 4:11) and the making of it, as to time and order, and things contained in it, is owing to the sovereign will of God; to what else but to his sovereignty can it be ascribed, that he has not made more worlds than he has, who could, if he would, have made ten thousand worlds? or that he should make this world when he did, and not sooner, when he could have made it millions of ages before, if he would? or that he should be six days making that, and all things in it, when he could have made them all in a moment, if he pleased? or that he made this world no larger than it is, and made no more kinds and

species of creatures than he has, and those he has made no more numerous than they be? no reason can be assigned, but his sovereign will and pleasure.

2. The sovereignty of the will of God appears in providence, and in the various events of it; as in the births and deaths of men, which are neither of them of the will of men, but of the will of God; and there is a time for both fixed by his will; and in which his sovereignty may be seen; for to what else can it be ascribed, that such and such men should be born, and brought into the world, in such an age, and not before? and that they should go out of the world at the time, in the manner and circumstances they do? and that there should be such difference in men, in their states, conditions, and circumstances in life; that some should be rich, and others poor? riches and poverty are both at the disposal of God, as Agur's prayer shows; and God is the maker both of the rich and poor, not only as men, but as rich and poor men: and to what can this difference be attributed, but to the sovereign will of God? some are raised to great honour and dignity; and others live in a very low, mean, and abject state; but promotion comes neither from the East, nor from the West, nor from the South; but God puts down one, and sets up another, as he pleases; and these differences and changes may be observed in the same persons, as in Job, who was for many years the greatest man in all the East, and, on a sudden, was stripped of all his riches, honour, and glory, and upon a dunghill; and then, after a while, restored to twice the wealth and riches he had before. So Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest monarch then on earth, and when in the most flourishing circumstances, and in the height of his grandeur, was degraded from his dignity, as a man and monarch, and driven to dwell among beasts, and to become and live like one of them; and, after all, was restored to his reason, and to his throne, and former greatness; which extorted from him such an acknowledgment of the sovereign will of God as perhaps is no where more strongly expressed; "He doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou?" (Dan. 4:35). Some are free from sickness and diseases of body all their days; their strength is firm, and no weaknesses in their death, but die in their full strength: while others drag on a life attended with a variety of infirmities and disorders, to their graves; and this is the case of the best of men: to what can it be imputed, but to the sovereign will of God? and how otherwise can be accounted for the many abortions, miscarriages, untimely births, infants that never saw light; and others, as soon as their eyes are opened in this world, are shut again; when others not only go through the stages of infancy, childhood, and manhood, but arrive to a full age, and come to their graves like a shock of corn fully ripe? And a multitude of other things might be

observed, in providence; which, though God has wise reasons for them, are unaccountable to us, but are obliged to refer them to his sovereign will and pleasure; who gives no account of his matters to the children of men.

3. The will of God appears to be sovereign in things sacred, spiritual, and religious, both with respect to angels and men: as that some of the angels should be elect, and confirmed by the grace of Christ, in the estate in which they were created, and be preserved from apostasy, while a large number of them were suffered to rebel against God, and leave their first state; for which they were cast down from heaven to hell, and reserved in chains of darkness, to the judgment of the great day, and no mercy shown to any of them; as has been to many of the apostate race of Adam. What other reason can be given for all this, but the sovereign will of God?

Among men, some God loves, and some he hates; and that before good or evil are done by them; some he chooses to everlasting happiness, and others he passes by and rejects; he has mercy on some, and hardens others; just as he, in his sovereignty, wills and pleases: some are redeemed from among men, by Christ, even out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation, whom he wills, and resolves to save; when others are left to perish in their sins: for which no other cause can be assigned than the sovereign will and pleasure of God. According to which also he dispenses his gifts to men, and these of different sorts; some fitting for public service, as to ministers of the gospel; and such he makes whensoever he pleases, and gives them gifts differing from one another; to some greater to others less, to some one talent and to others five, dividing to every man individually as he wills, according to his sovereign pleasure: the means of grace, the ministry of the word and ordinances, in all ages, have been disposed of, just as seemed good in his sight; for many hundreds of years, God gave his word to Jacob, and his statutes unto Israel, and other nations knew them not; and these have been since distributed among the Gentiles, sometimes in one place, and sometimes in another; and how apparent is the sovereignty of God in favouring our British Isles, these Isles afar off, with the gospel, and gospel ordinances, when so great a part of the world is denied them, and is covered with Pagan, Papal, and Mahometan darkness? and still more it is manifest in that these outward means are, to some, “the savour of life unto life, and to others the savour of death unto death.” The special gifts of the grace of God, are bestowed upon men according to the sovereign will of God; of his own will he regenerates some, and not others; calls by his grace, whom he pleases, when and by what means, according to his purpose; reveals the gospel, and the great things of it, to whom he would make them known; and hides them from the wise and prudent; “even so Father”, says Christ,

“for so it seemed good in thy sight”; nor does he give any other reason for such a conduct. The graces of the Spirit of God are given to some, and not to others; as for instance, repentance, which is a grant from God, a gift of Christ, was bestowed on Peter, who denied his Lord; and withheld from Judas, that betrayed him. Faith, which is the gift of God, all men have it not; to some it is only given, when others have a spirit of slumber, eyes that they see not, and ears that they hear not. In short, eternal life, which is the free gift of God, through Christ, is given only by him, to as many as the Father has given him, and to these alike; the penny, which seems to mean eternal happiness, in the parable, is given to those who were called to labour in the vineyard in the eleventh hour, as to those who bore the heat and burden of the day: some do much service for Christ, and others very little, and yet all share the same glory. To what can all this be resolved, but into the sovereign will of God? who says, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?” (Matthew 20:15). But though the will of God is sovereign, it always acts wisely: some sovereign princes will things rashly and foolishly; but God wills nothing contrary to his perfections of wisdom, justice, holiness, &c. and his will is therefore called “counsel”, and “the counsel of his will” (Isa. 25:1, 46:10; Eph. 1:11).