

LECTURE I.*

Ephes. i. 11.

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

HAVING discoursed to you, what I thought requisite, concerning the attributes and perfections of the Divine Being, we now come, according to the order of discourse, to speak to you of the **DIVINE DECREES**. I choose to call them by that name, because, by divines, they are usually so called; though according to the more ordinary use of that word in Scripture, it more frequently signifies public laws or edicts, whether human or divine, than private and secret purposes. And so in common speech too, and other writings, nothing is more usual than to call the constitutions of states and princes, *decreta*. But however, the word being so explained, to signify a secret purpose, antecedent to any manifestation, it may then fitly enough be so used; and in that sense, it is generally understood by divines, treating on the head of religion.

And upon this subject, my design is not to speak to every thing that is disputed in the schools about it; but only what may be requisite, and sufficient unto the common faith and practice of christians. Nor shall I need to lay down any other doctrine, than the very words of the text, that—God “work-

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eth all things, according to the counsel of his own will,"—wherein you do see, there are several particulars to be considered. There is,

1. The final term of all God's works, that wherein they do directly terminate, *All things*.

2. There is his working itself, tending towards that term, he *worketh* all things.

3. There is his purpose and volition of all that he worketh, called his *will*. And

4. There is the supreme measure of all those volitions or acts of his will, and so of his subsequent actions, and that of his counsel. He worketh all things according to the *counsel* of his own will.

I shall speak briefly to each of these, but most largely to that which is our most proper subject, with reference to the purpose for which we have chosen to insist upon these words, that is, the will of God; not merely the faculty, but the acts of his will. But we shall briefly go over the several particulars already mentioned.

1. For the things wherein the acts willed by him, do finally terminate, which we are told are *all things*, and that universality may be understood two ways, either relatively, in reference to those works that do terminate in these things; as if he said, all things that he works, he works according to the counsel of his will. Or else, also, it may be understood absolutely and simply, there being simply nothing at all, unto which his agency, one way or other, extends not: though not to every thing in the same way; as there will be occasion to shew hereafter.

2. For his working that terminates in these things, that is, in all things; it is emphatically expressed in the text: the word is ενεργωντων, in-acting, or in-working all things. It shews the peculiar kind of the divine agency, such as nothing can exclude, and nothing can disappoint. And then,

3. There is his will itself, which must be looked upon as the immediate source of all these operations of his. And that we shall consider, not only as it is the measure of all his actings, but as it is self-measured by that counsel, that lies in his eternal and all-comprehending mind, which is the fourth particular in order, that we have briefly to consider. And touching that,

4. We must know, that it cannot be understood in the same sense with God, and with men, as indeed nothing can that comes under the same name with him and with us; for nothing can be absolutely common between God and the creature; or have precisely the same common notion: there cannot but be infinite difference, always, between whatsoever is finite, and that

which is infinite. Counsel with men imports imperfection; it signifies that we have not suddenly a perspection of the reason, and aptitudes of things, what it is fit for us to resolve, and not to resolve! and do, or not to do. And thereupon, we deliberate, and arrive more slowly and by degrees from a more indistinct perception of the reason of things, to a clearer and more distinct perception of them. With God, it cannot be so, before whose all-seeing eye, all things lie in their aptitudes and correspondencies at one view; so as he doth not see things because they are connected with one another, so as to proceed from the knowledge of things that are more clear, to the knowledge of things that are more obscure; all things being equally clear and equally present, to his eye and to his view. But by way of analogy, that which is effected by counsel among men in the way of consultation, debate of things with themselves, continued discourse, reasonings and arguings of matters in their own minds to and fro, that, which with men hereupon is called judgment, counsel, hath the same name given it with him also. Not that it signifies the same, but that most perfect judgment of things, which is indeed the highest and most exquisite wisdom, which he hath eternally and all at once, when we do arrive to the like by steps. And so according to that perfect perception, that he hath of the reason of things, and their aptitudes and correspondencies to one another, and to his creatures, and to him, so accordingly he wills, and accordingly he doth.

And this counsel of his, it may be taken two ways, either 1st. As it is internal, lying only in his own mind: or else 2nd. As it hath an after manifestation, as many of those things which lay from eternity, and through many successions of ages of time, secret in his own mind have, and do come to be revealed and made manifest more or less, and in such degrees as to him hath seemed fit. In that latter sense, counsel is taken frequently in Scripture, even when it is spoken of God, as these phrases do plainly signify, "If they had stood in my counsel. They despised all my counsel, and set at nought my reproofs. I have declared to you the whole counsel of God." Jer. 23. 22. Pro. 1. 30. Acts 20. 27.

But here, it must be understood to signify counsel as it is secret, as lying in his own eternal mind, and as it is, thereupon, the measure of all the purposes of his will, and of all he subsequently doth, and hath done, in the creation and continual government of this world. In that latter sense, counsel is, even among men, correspondently in that acceptation of it with God, put for certain, established laws, and constitutions, and even as

decrees are. Thus, with the Romans, many constitutions of theirs are known to go under the name of *senatus consulta*, that is, *things consulted of*, and agreed upon, by the governing power among them. But this is not the sense that it is to be taken in here, for notwithstanding much of the counsel of God be manifested, we are to consider it now as antecedent to any such manifestations: and thereupon, to return to that which is our more principal subject, *his will*, according to such counsel, “He works all things after the counsel of his own will;” according to that counsel which doth (as it were) guide and measure all the determinations and purposes of his just and holy will. We are not to understand, that the divine will here signifies the faculty of will, abstractly and precisely, but as comprehending the acts, the volitions, the determinations and purposes of the divine will, that which is commonly meant by the word decrees. And so, concerning the will of God and the purposes thereof, I shall first give you some *distinctions*, and then, secondly, lay down what I conceive necessary to be said concerning this subject in certain *propositions*.

First. There are sundry *distinctions* of the divine will, which it may be fit to take some notice of: and some of them will be of great use to us.

1. There are, who distinguish the will of God into antecedent and consequent. But I know no ground for that distinction, there being no first or last with him, or former or latter, as we shall have occasion further to shew.

2. Again, some distinguish it into absolute and conditional; but certainly, it is over bold to feign any such distinction as that, of the divine will, properly so called; it is indeed agreed on all hands that there are conditions of the things willed, but there can be none of the will itself concerning those things; the faculty and act of the will not being distinguishable in God, as they are in us; for he is a pure act: and to suppose there can be a condition of the will itself in God, is to suppose a conditional Deity and so, consequently, a contingent one, and so, consequently, none at all.

3. Again, some do more truly distinguish the divine will into that which is *bene placite*, and that which is *signi*. And for the former member of that distinction, it is most unexceptionable and scriptural: good pleasure, and the *good pleasure of his will*, we read of again and again in this very context, as well as many times besides in Scripture. But for the other member of the description, it is too obscure for common use; and will require more explication than is proper for this place.

4. It is again distinguishable into his objective and active

will, or his will objectively taken and actively taken, so the thing willed is often called the will of God : as when we pray, “Thy will be done,” that is, the thing that thou hast willed. And so that of the apostle, in the Acts, “The will of the Lord be done,” and that of our Saviour, “he that doth the will of my Father,” and the like. This is the will of God taken objectively, or for the thing willed. But then, it is taken also actively, as it signifies his volition itself, the purpose and determination of his will ; and so it must be taken here.

5. It is again distinguishable into secret and revealed ; a very useful and necessary distinction. His will, as it lies concealed within himself, and the same will, in many things made at length known and extant to the world, subjected to the common notice of men ; that is, in such things as it concerns them to know and be acquainted with.

6. Others distinguish it into decretive and legislative, which is a very proper distinction too, if we take decretive in the fore-explained sense ; otherwise, it falls in with the legislative, and is the same thing.

7. Others distinguish it into the will of purpose and the will of precept, which is a true distinction too. Only, that latter member is not extensive enough ; for there are many things which, in the compass of God’s revealed will, are necessary for us to know ; and even within the compass of his legislative will, besides bare precept ; but not in all respects. His will concerns what he will do himself, and it also concerns what he will have us to do. But it is his will concerning his own actions, concerning his own works, of which the text speaks : “He worketh all things,” that is, his own works, “after the counsel of his own will.” And as it doth concern his own works, it may concern them diversely : that is, either such works of his as he designs to do immediately, and apart from us, or such works of his as have a reference to works of ours, wherein he is to work with us, or wherein he is to work, (as in some instances) after us ; that is, in those great instances of rewarding and punishing. These works of his come after ours, though the will of them is eternal before. Again,

8. His will is to be distinguished into effective and permissive : his will to effect whatsoever he thinks fit for him to effect ; and his will to permit whatsoever he thinks fit to permit, or not to hinder, when what he so wills, or determines so to permit, he intends also to regulate, and not to behold as an idle unconcerned spectator, but to dispose all those *permissa* unto wise and great ends of his own.

These useful distinctions (as there are divers of them) being given, I shall now proceed,

Secondly. To lay down, in divers *propositions*, what is requisite for us to understand and believe, concerning this matter, of God's purpose, by his counsel, in reference to the things which he works among his creatures, and some of these propositions will be more *general*, and fundamental unto some others, which shall be (God willing) more *particular*. But for the more *general propositions* you may take such as these :

1. That all the purposes of the divine will are co-eternal. There can be no such thing as a new will in God ; for there is nothing in God, that is not God ; and nothing of God can begin *de novo*: for that were to suppose a new Deity. And hereupon, there can be no place for dispute about the priority or posteriority of this or that purpose of God ; they must be all simultaneous, all at once, in one and the same eternal view, according to that clear and distinct and all-comprehending prospect that he hath of all things, eternally before his eyes. And though it be true, indeed, that we are constrained to conceive of things ; (because we cannot conceive them all at once as he doth,) by first and second, former and latter, and to consider of a natural priority and posteriority, where there is no such thing in real existence ; I say, though we are constrained so to do, (which is a thing owing to the imperfection of our minds,) yet, we must take heed of building upon our own foundation, schemes and models of the divine decrees, as a great many have perplexed themselves in doing : and wherein we can determine nothing, but with the greatest uncertainty imaginable, nor, indeed, without too great presumption, bringing down the Deity to our human measures and models, and forms of conception. Again,

2. We must take this proposition concerning the will and purposes of God, that they do always connect together means and ends: that is, supposing he hath willed and determined such an end, we must, accordingly, suppose he hath determined with himself the way or means, by which he will bring that end about ; supposing it to be a thing to be done immediately : as those things are to be done, and in the same way wherein they are to be brought about, in the same way we must understand he hath determined to bring them about. As when he did intend to preserve David at Keilah, he did also determine he should not stay there, knowing that if he did, the inhabitants would have given him up to Saul, as you may read it was determined, upon David's inquiry, 1 Sam. 23. So when he determined to save the life of Paul, and all his companions, and fellow passengers in the ship, where they were in so much jeopardy and danger, he did also determine that the mariners should not go away, for the apostle saith expressly, " If these

go away we cannot be saved," after he had expressly, from God, told them, that not a hair of any of their heads should fall to the ground. And therefore, we are not to suppose that he doth determine an end to be brought about by means, but he doth also determine and ascertain the means by which it shall be brought about : so that if he intend any of us to live to such a term of time, he never intends that, and intends at the same time to let us, several years before, starve ourselves, poison or stab ourselves. But determining the end, he also determines those means by which he intends to bring about that end : he intends to bring it about in such a way : that is, in a mediate way.

3. The purposes of God, and his foreknowledge are in some sort commensurate: taking foreknowledge in the proper sense, foreknowledge doth refer to futurity, as knowledge more abstractly taken, doth to all beings actual and possible; all possibilities come within the compass of divine knowledge : but of his foreknowledge, only futurities, or what shall be. And as to these, his purpose and foreknowledge are some way commensurate, that is, whatsoever he foreknows shall be, he either purposeth to effect, or he purposeth not to hinder it. And again,

4. Whatsoever God doth actually bring to pass, that we may conclude he did purpose to bring to pass. Whatsoever he doth, he did purpose to do; for he doth nothing against his will, or without his will: and he can have no new will, as was told you before, and as it is plain in itself. Therefore, whatsoever he actually doth, he did always eternally purpose to do. *

5. Whatsoever he actually permits, he did never purpose to hinder. There must be a correspondency between his purpose as to *permissa*, things that are permitted by him, and the things permitted, as there is with reference to *effecta*; between his purpose, and the thing that he effects. Again further.

6. Whatsoever God might, righteously and consistently with all the other attributes and perfections of his being, effect and do, or permit and suffer, that he might righteously resolve and purpose to do, and resolve and purpose to permit and not to hinder. Whatsoever it is that is consistent with his wisdom, holiness and goodness, actually to do, it is equally consistent with his wisdom, and with his righteousness, and with his goodness, to purpose to do, even from eternity. And whatsoever was consistent with his wisdom, and righteousness, and goodness to permit it and not to hinder, it is equally consistent with his wisdom, righteousness and goodness, to purpose not

to hinder it; and so, to have a permissive decree concerning it, if he saw meet and fit to do it. And,

7. Whatsoever, in respect to God's actions and purposes, would imply any thing of imperfection, we must sever and remove from him; whatsoever would imply perfection, we must assert and ascribe to him. Hereupon, if it would be a plain, manifest imperfection to act incogitantly, unadvisedly, or to do unintended things, as it were casually and at random, without a foregoing intention or purpose; if that, I say, would be an imperfection, we ought most carefully to sever it from God, and never think it possible for him to act so; that is, incogitantly, unadvisedly, without any foregoing intention or purpose; and if it be a perfection, to act according to wisdom and counsel, and judgment, and steady purpose, we must by all means assert it concerning God, and ascribe it to him in reference to all his purposes and actions.

These are general propositions that do lay some foundation for more particular ones, which are to follow. And herein, though it is very true, that God hath his purposes and decrees concerning all things: "He worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will," yet, we shall more especially consider his purposes concerning men. You know, that must be our business: and therein too, though he hath purposes and decrees concerning all the actions of men, whether personally considered, or considered as members of a community, lesser or larger, civil or ecclesiastical, concerning churches, concerning states and kingdoms, their successions, their rises, their continuance, their periods; though he have, I say, purposes concerning all these, and all within the compass of the text, "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," yet, I shall chiefly keep my discourse to those purposes that concern our spiritual and eternal state. And so shall lay down briefly the other and *particular* propositions. As,

1. That God did, undoubtedly, purpose to make such a world as this, for we find he hath made it; and he doth nothing that he did not purpose to do.

2. He did purpose to make such a creature as man, and place him here; for we also find, so he hath done.

3. He did purpose to create man in an innocent state, and proportionably good and happy unto the innocency and purity in which he did create him. For his word tells us, that he did create him so. He "made man upright." And it gives us an account of the circumstances of his condition when he made him, though briefly, yet as far as was necessary. And,

4. He did not purpose to confirm him at first in that good state wherein he made him, so as to make it impossible for him to fall; for we find he did fall, and is in a lapsed state: therefore, it was purposed that his fall should not be prevented, that it should not be hindered: though none doubt, but that he that made man, could have made him as well impeccable, without any possibility of sinning, as he did make him sinless at present, without any thing of depravedness by sin.

5. It is evident, God did not purpose to leave fallen man to perish universally in his apostate, fallen state: for we hear of, and know, the methods and appointed means for the recovery and salvation of fallen creatures, of fallen men, which are offered to our view in the word of God.

6. He did decree or purpose to send his own Son to be a Redeemer and Saviour unto lost and perishing creatures, to be born, to live in this world, to die in pursuance of that reconciling design, and to overcome death; and in his resurrection and conquest over death, to erect a kingdom into which he would collect, as the voluntary subjects of it, all those that should resign and yield themselves to him, put themselves under his governing power, and submit themselves to his saving mercy, at once. And the substance of this we have given us as the matter of a divine decree, in that psalm 2. 7. "I will declare the decree. The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." Very true it is, that that is not directly meant of the nativity of our Lord: we find the apostle expounds it otherwise, (Acts 13. 33.) "We declare to you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made to our fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the 2d psalm," (the most express quotation in the New Testament out of the Old) "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee: and as concerning that he raised him from the dead *now* no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David." It was in pursuance of a divine, eternal purpose and decree, that this was said, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee:" that is, when he raised him from the dead, when he begot him again out of the grave, and by that glorious regeneration, he did then put upon him that high and excellent title (that was fundamental to the other glorious one that did ensue thereupon) "The first-begotten from the dead: the Prince of the kings of the earth." Rev. 1. 5. But yet, though that be not the thing directly there spoken of, as the matter of the divine decree, God's first bringing him into this world, yet, that being

the matter of a divine decree, (to wit) his dying, and his conquering death, and being begotten (as it were) a second time, or I may say a third time out of the grave, out of the womb, as his goings forth from eternity in respect of his Deity, and as he was, as man, at first brought out of the womb of the virgin, yet, even that earlier parturition must be supposed here, to have been the matter of a divine purpose and decree too. And so other scriptures do speak of the whole complex of this matter, as falling under a divine purpose. "That he verily was foreordained," (as Acts 2. 23.—1 Pet. 1. 20. and onwards) foreordained to every thing he did, and foreordained to every thing he suffered, in pursuance of that great saving design and errand upon which it was determined he should come into this world. And this is that which the context here doth more specially lead us to insist upon. For when the apostle speaks of God doing all things according to the counsel of his own will, he tells us more distinctly what that counsel of his will did concern, and that is in the foregoing verse: "That, in the dispensation of the fulness of time, he might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth, even in him." This was the great thing that lay, as the substratum in the divine counsel, to collect and gather all things in Christ, to constitute him as supreme and universal Head to this creation. And whereas, all things were shattered and broken in the apostasy, there was now to be a recapitulation, and gathering all things under one head again, as you see in the close of the chapter. "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." And this, that was primarily here designed in this context, is that which God hath done according to the counsel of his will. "He doth all things after the counsel of his own will;" but this peculiarly, the sending of his Son into this world and the establishing of him as the Prince of those reduced from the state of apostasy. As the great destroyer of souls was the prince of the apostasy, the head of the apostate world, upon which account he is called "the God of this world." (2 Cor. 4. 4.) and "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience," so was our blessed Lord to be the head of that community that should be collected and gathered out of this world. And this was the great mystery of his will, which he purposed in himself, as the foregoing context is, "In the dispensation of the fulness of time" (by the Christian economy, that is the word there used for dispensation) to collect and gather, all under this one glorious head, to recover a people, and raise up a

glorious structure, a church, out of a ruining and perishing world, by the Son and eternal God, who was made, in pursuance of this design, the universal Head, also Head over all things, but with special reference to his church. And so was this the matter of divine pleasure; to do this thing in the fulness of time, according as we find in Gal. 4. 4. "In the fulness of time, God sent his Son, born of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that are under the law: that we might receive the adoption of sons." And as this is the most undoubted matter of divine purpose and decree, so it ought to be the matter of the highest joy and rejoicing; greater than can be expressed by an annual solemnity; such as should run through our lives, and be the matter of every day's rejoicing with us, according to what the first report of this glorious work was, when the womb of divine counsel did teem, and bring forth this glorious birth; when he brought forth the first begotten, into the world, he saith, "Let all the angels of God worship him:" and they did publish the joyful proclamation of it from heaven, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace good will towards men:" the greatest indication of divine good will, and the most significant that ever was known, or ever could be thought, that is, that when men had severed themselves from God, cut themselves off from him; and the world was sunk into a universal oblivion of him, destitute of all inclination towards him, and all interest in him, unapt to make any inquiries after him, or to say "Where is our God, our Maker?" that they should be so surprisingly told of Emmanuel, God with us: that God should so strangely descend, put on man, be manifested in the flesh, there was the greatest mystery of Godliness, that ought to fill heaven and earth with joy and with wonder. For when something like this was apprehended, but upon mistake, in what transports were these pagans! "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." Acts 14. 11 And presently they offer at sacrificing. What matter of joy and wonder then, that the glorious, eternal Son of God, should make that descent, that kind descent, into this world of ours! Because we were partakers of flesh and blood, he himself likewise, takes part with us of the same: (Heb. 2. 14.) and because we dwelt in fleshly tabernacles, he himself resolved to erect a tabernacle like one of ours: "The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us:" (John 1. 14.) did tabernacle among us is the expression: this being, as it were, his very sense in this vouchsafement and undertaking: "There is a company of poor creatures that dwell in flesh, or buried in it, rather than do dwell in it, and their flesh is more their grave

than their mansion; well! because they are partakers of flesh and blood, and have tabernacles made of flesh, "I will go and set my tabernacle by theirs, they dwell in fleshly tents, and I will go and dwell in such a tent among them." The Son of God was made flesh, did dwell and tabernacle among us in such flesh as we inhabit, excepting the impurity and sinfulness of it. O! what matter of glory and exultation is this! How full of triumph should it fill the souls of men, that such a hope should arise to them, even as a resurrection from the dead! Now we see that God's kindness towards the children of men, is not shut up in everlasting oblivion; it is not suspended from any further exercise for ever; what a glorious instance of it is here!

But as this is matter of highest joy, it ought to be matter of purest joy too. And there is not a little caution requisite in this case. The numerous appearance here this day signifies to me, that there is a great propension to keep on foot an annual solemnity upon this account: and as this is expressive of a disposition to rejoice, or to somewhat of rejoicing, I pray take these cautions in reference to it,—that it be not ignorant rejoicing, that it be not carnal rejoicing, and above all, that it be not wicked rejoicing, more grossly and more sensually wicked.

(1.) Let it not be ignorant rejoicing. Rejoice we may, and must, in such a thing, that according to divine purpose and decree, Christ came into the world, and the Son of God became man, that he might become a sacrifice, and that thereupon he might become a glorious King. To rejoice in this abstractly, that Christ was once born into this world, without understanding or ever desiring to understand what he was thus born for; what was the end of this manifestation and appearance of him in human flesh; this doth unbecome men, and much more doth it unbecome christians, it being to rejoice for they know not what. For what is it to us, if we abstract from the ends of the incarnation of the Son of God? if we subject not to the proper ends of it? What is it to us that Christ lived here on earth, somewhat above sixteen hundred years ago, and to rejoice in that he did so, without considering and understanding what it was for, upon what account it was, and with what design? This, I say, is but the joy of a fool: to rejoice in that, the true reason whereof, our own gross and voluntary ignorance hides from us; to rejoice when we hear that he came as a Saviour, without considering what he was to save us from, (though we are told at the same time,) when we hear of his being called Emmanuel, God with us, of his

being called Jesus (Matt. 1. latter end) because he should save his people from their sins; to rejoice in Christ, even as an incarnate Saviour, without any thoughts of this, that I am to be saved by him, from that which made the distance, and continues the distance between God and me: I am to be saved by him from the impurities of my own heart and nature; I am to be saved by him from the vile carnality that hath depressed and sunk my soul so as never to mind God, never to desire after him, never to delight in him, to have inclinations to pray to him: I say, to rejoice ignorantly in these respects, is to rejoice presumptuously, for we know not what, and over confidently, against the direction and instruction given to us in that second psalm. Because God hath declared the decree concerning him, "Thou art my Son," and hath set him as his King upon his holy hill of Zion; and hath resolved to subdue the nations under him, and give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession, therefore to serve this mighty King with fear, and rejoice before him with trembling, that is the instruction that is given us. There is a pure and holy Deity hath become incarnate, the Son of God became, here, a God amongst us, with that resolution, not to bear with the wickedness of the world, and let men run on in their old and wonted course; but to revive God's memorial and the awe and fear of him in the hearts of men; and not to let men live prayerless lives, as they did, and without God in the world as they did; here was his great design. But now to rejoice in Christ's having been born into the world, without ever considering the design of it: this is not only mean and brutish, but insolent and presumptuous, to rejoice in the thoughts of so sacred and great a thing as this, without having hearts touched and impressed with the apprehension of the pure and holy end of it. And,

(2.) Take heed of rejoicing carnally, with such a kind of joy as shall be exclusive of, or that shall exclude, that spiritual sense we ought to have of so high and mighty an undertaking and intendment as this. How vain and how grossly incongruous and absurd is it to say, that because the Son of God came into this world upon such a design as you have heard, "Therefore, let us eat and drink and be merry, therefore, let us pamper and adorn this flesh;" forgetting that it is inhabited (even this mortal flesh) by an immortal spirit, and forgetting that even this flesh of ours is claimed and challenged to be a temple for the Holy Ghost, and therein made conformed to the flesh of Christ, which is itself such a Temple, and the model according to which, all Christian temples, that is, a temple in a temple, in every christian, ought to be formed. "Know

ye not," saith the apostle, "that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost?" (1 Cor. 6. 19.) and they are to be indulged and cared for accordingly. Christ speaks it of his own body, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days!" As he was, even in his human nature, and in his body, a Temple of the living God, so is every christian to be; and therefore, are these bodies of ours to be cared for in subserviency to this design. This body of mine, it is to be the living, animated temple of the Divine, Living Spirit. And what! is it then to be indulged, to be pampered, to be adorned with a fine dress, and is this all that I am to design concerning it? I am to design in it conformity to the great Original Temple, the Son of God. But to rejoice with such a sort of festivity as is only grateful to carnal and fleshly inclination, without any thought of being recovered and brought back to God by this Christ, of having my soul refined, and body and soul made meet to glorify the great God whose they both are: to joy without any thought of this, (I say) looks more like a pagan than a christian; and is much more suitable to the paganish than the Christian state. It ought to be considered, Christ took our flesh to make us partakers of his Spirit; he took our nature to make us partakers of his divine nature, escaping the corruptions that are in this world through lust: and to please ourselves in the thoughts of Christ having been born, without any thought of this, is such a carnality as affronts the very pretence that we make of rejoicing in the thoughts of it, that the Son of God did descend and come down to associate himself, and dwell among the sons of men in this world, and to suffer for them, and so to prepare them to dwell with God in the other world.

(3.) But lastly, Take heed of such a kind of rejoicing as is more grossly and sensually wicked, even in itself and in its own nature: that is, to make the season when we, uncertainly, apprehend Christ to have been born into this world, the season of letting loose to all manner of looseness and debauchery, in direct contradiction to, and defiance of, the design of his coming: that is, when we know the Son of God was manifest to take away sin, and to destroy the works of the devil; as the expressions are, (1 John 3. 5. 8.) that we should make it our business to indulge and fulfil those very lusts which he came to destroy and dissolve and make cease out of the world; what an affront is this to him whose memorial we pretend to celebrate! That is to make that which we imagine to be the day of his birth, to be the day of his most ignominious death, by crucifying afresh to ourselves the Son of God, and putting him to

open shame, as if we would proclaim to the world, that the design of the Son of God's descent into it, was to give men the liberty of being safely wicked, that they might throw off all restraint, and without any fear or dread of what should follow, abandon themselves to all manner of wickedness, to fulfil the impure lusts of a corrupt, depraved nature, till sin, being finished, should end in eternal death : and so make the Christian religion an inconsistency with itself, and to represent the matter, as if Christ came into the world, not to make men christians, but to exempt them from being so ; and not to destroy sin out of the world, but to exclude and shut out Christianity. As if he came into the world that there might never be any such thing as Christianity in it, that he might bring it about, that men might, with safety and impunity, live in the highest rebellion against the very laws of that Christ by whom they pretend to expect salvation.

But this is one great thing which we see lies under divine purpose and decree, according to the counsel of his will, the sending of his Son into the world to be a Redeemer and Saviour of sinners, by living among them, dying for them, conquering death, ascending to heaven, and erecting that kingdom by which he is to govern the redeemed community unto everlasting life. And by how much the more apparently this was matter of divine purpose according to eternal counsel, so much the higher and more dreadful wickedness must it needs be, to indulge in ourselves such a disposition of spirit, or so to shape our course that both shall lie counter to the divine counsels in all this. That is, when Christ did not come into the world by accident, but by design and by purpose, according to the wisest counsel, and eternal and most stable counsel, we should set ourselves, as much as in us is, to overturn the whole frame of that divine and eternal counsel of heaven ; that is, that it shall never take place with me, "I will never be subject to him, I will never know him, never come into union with him, never resign up myself unto him ; I will be mine own still, and live still at the utmost distance from God and defiance of him." By how much the more apparent this was the product of the divine will according to counsel, so more fearful and horrid must be the wickedness that stands in direct opposition thereto.

LECTURE II.*

But now to go on with other particular propositions about the decrees of God.

7. That those terms of life and death for sinners, which God hath actually settled and published in his gospel, those we may be sure he did intend and purpose should be the terms of life and death unto us. Whatsoever, (as you have heard in the general propositions,) God actually doth, we may be sure he intended and purposed to do. What he doth, he doth willingly when he doth it. No force can be put upon him; he never doth any thing against his will, and what he once willed he doth always will, for there can be with him no new will. Therefore, whereas, he hath enacted and published such things as these to the world, as the terms of life and death to sinners; that whosoever believes shall be saved, but whosoever believeth not shall be damned: that he gave his only begotten Son with that design, that they who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life; that they that believed not, are condemned already: they that believe, have everlasting life; they that believe not, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on them: that sinners are to repent, that their sins may be blotted out; that they that repent shall not all alike perish: (Luke 13. 3.) that the things that eye hath not seen, that the ear hath not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man to conceive, are all prepared for them that love God: (1 Cor. 2. 9.) but, they that love him not, that love not the Lord Jesus, are so many *anathema*, *accursed*, till he come: (1 Cor. 16. 22.) that Christ shall be the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him: (Heb. 5. 9.) but, that he shall come in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of his Son; (2 Thess. 1. 8.) these, I say, being the declared terms of life and death to sinners, enacted and actually published to the world as such, these you may be sure God did intend and purpose should be such. His purpose was eternal, and a decree, as that word was explained. This is out of all question, that such terms of life or death to sinners, as have been mentioned, are the matter of divine, eternal decree; he did always intend they should be so. Whence it is obvious to collect, that he can have no contrary decree, no contrary purpose. That is, wheresoever his pleasure is published and made known, so as to be capable to be understood about these matters, God will

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never deal with men upon other terms. There can be no repugnant purpose to any such purpose as this; that is to say, that he will save any whether they believe or no, or though they finally persist in obstinate infidelity and impenitency and rebellion against him to the last. It is never to be supposed, that he will do such a thing without decreeing it, so that he should have ever decreed it against such a decree as this. And so, on the other hand, that he will ever finally condemn, or hath ever decreed or purposed finally to condemn any that shall believe, that shall repent, that shall love him above all, and finally subject themselves to his government, whensoever they are brought to do so in Christ: therefore, it is vain and unscriptural, without foundation any way, for men to embolden themselves on the one hand, "Let me be never so wicked, or never so careless, I may be saved at last for all that; I do not know but God hath decreed to save me." Or, that any should torment themselves on the other hand with afflicting thoughts, "Let me do what I will, if I never so earnestly set myself, and seek help from heaven, that I may believe, that I may repent, that I may have my heart changed, renewed, and brought to love God, and subject myself to him in Christ, yet, there may be a decree against me and I may perish for all this." There is no reason, no foundation on the one hand or on the other, for any such imagined decree of God, against these plain declared decrees of his: they are (as to what is compendious and comprehensive of all) final believers who lie under the decree or purpose of salvation; and final infidels who lie under the decree or purpose of condemnation.

So much, in general, is most certainly decreed, that they who believe shall be saved, and they that believe not, shall perish. But I further add,

8. God hath not purposed this in the general, that he will save such as are wrought up to a compliance with his declared known terms of salvation; but whensoever he doth actually enable any to believe and repent, we may conclude that he did eternally intend so to do. And whosoever he doth actually conserve in a safe state, that is, enables them continually to believe, (it is enough to instance in this one thing, with which the rest are so essentially connected, that they are all implied, if this one be actually to be found, and even in the very mention of this one,) if he actually enable any to believe to the saving of their souls unto their final salvation, he did always from eternity, intend so to enable them. And so, he hath not only decreed, or intended certain indefinite and undeterminate species to life and salvation, but particular persons as is most evident many ways.

(1.) Scripture is most express in it : if you look to the foregoing verses, divers of them in this same chapter, you will find it. In what a transport, towards the beginning, do you find the apostle blessing God. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed *us* with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places, (or things) in Christ. According as he hath chosen *us* in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unblamable before him in love: having predestinated *us*, to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto 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." And in this same 11th. verse, where the text lies, "in whom also *we* have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated, according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." And nothing, again, can be plainer than that known and famous text, Rom. 8. 30. "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called : and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." This is a chain that can never be broken; and equally expresseth that in the 2 Thes. 2. 13. where the apostle gives solemn thanks, even for them, that God had chosen *them* unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. And in that, 1. Peter 1. 2. "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus." These (as it is observable, and was told you before, in those more general propositions,) do manifestly connect means and end together. But they do ascertain both, concerning some, and not leave the matter indefinite and undetermined, as if he did in the dark, make and form purposes with himself, without discerning, at the same time, who should comply with his pleasure, as to such terms of life, and who should not. And besides so express scriptures, the matter is,

(2.) Evident in itself, that whomsoever he doth actually enable to comply with such terms of life and salvation, he did purpose and decree to enable. For when he doth so, when he gives a man faith, when he gives him repentance, which are most expressly said to be the gift of God : to you it is given to believe and suffer ; (Phil. 1. 29.) and Christ is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins. Acts 5. 31. I say, when he doth actually give these gifts, doth he give them with his will, or against his will? Is it to be supposed, that he should give them, and not will to give them? What could so impose upon him that he should give what he was not willing to give? But, if once he was willing,

and if then he was willing to give such a gift, he was always willing; for there cannot be with him a new will, and therefore, he was from eternity willing. And again,

(3.) That matter might be further argued, from what Scripture speaketh most expressly too, that as to that great and most comprehensive instance of faith in the Son of God; who-soever do receive Christ and believe in his name, when God enables them so to do, he regenerates them; "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed on his name." John 1. 12. And then, it is immediately subjoined in the 13th. ver. "Who were born not of flesh nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God." But if he do regenerate any, he doth it most willingly: "Of his own will begat he us, by the word of truth." James 1. 18. Agreeable to the expression in the text, "He doth all things according to the counsel of his own will." He did with counsel, will to regenerate whomsoever he regenerates. And,

(4.) It is altogether unimaginable, that God should do a thing so far exceeding all expectation, and even all wonder, as the sending of his own Son; he that was the brightness of his own glory, and the express image of his person, the Heir of all things, by whom he made the worlds; to be incarnate, to put on man, and to die upon a tree, so ignominiously, a spectacle to angels and men, and to leave it an undetermined thing whether any should be the better for it, yea, or no: or rather to leave it certain that none ever should be the better for it. For most certain it is, that as to those great terms, of life and salvation, none can ever be the better, if he do not, by his overpowering grace, influence minds and hearts, and work them up to a compliance with those terms, and work and effect them in them. The case is vastly different in respect to spiritual good, and in reference to the opposite evil; where, as to wicked actions, and a continued course of them, or any particular act in such and such circumstances, men will always determine themselves; they are apt and prone enough to do so. If they can, in such and such circumstances, they will do wickedly: but in reference to any spiritual action that is good and holy, and of a saving tendency, there is not so much of an indifferency, but a most fixed aversion, which nothing but the power of divine grace can conquer and overcome. Nothing but the almighty power of grace can make an enemy-heart become friendly towards God, and towards his Christ, can vanquish the malignity of an obstinate infidelity, can mollify an obdurate, hard heart, and make it dissolve and melt as in repentance it must. This is, therefore, altogether an un-

imaginable thing, that God should do what did so far exceed all expectation, and even all wonder, as to send his own eternal Son, to die upon a cross, and leave it uncertain, whether any should ever be the better for it: or rather certain that none ever should. And it is again,

(5.) Very unreasonable to think that the great God should have among men no objects of special favour; and it were foolish to suppose that it should be a reflection upon him to have it so. As it was formerly told you, it belongs only to a good governor, and even to the best that can be supposed, to deal equally with all; and kindly and favourably where he pleaseth. We are to distinguish matters of right, and matters of peculiar favour. Matters of right will be dispensed and administered with an equal hand, matters of special favour according to good pleasure, as it is expressed again and again, in the context. And plain it is, that there can be no natural right, which any creature can claim at the hand of God. Whatsoever becomes matter of right, from him to them, must only be by grace, by promise. He cannot be a debtor to his creature, till he makes himself so; and the promises by which he makes himself so, they "are all yea and amen in Christ;" (2. Cor. 1. 20.) only upon his account, only for his sake. Whatsoever there is that comes within the compass of a promise, for the encouragement of sinners to return and come to God, it will all be made good to a tittle upon his account that is worthy, all promises being "yea and amen" in him. But whatsoever is above promise, more than promise, is all from mere *ευδοκία*, the *good pleasure* of his goodness. It can be resolved into nothing else, turn we the matter in our thoughts never so long. He will make good all that was promised to every one to a tittle; all unpromised, peculiar favour, that is dispensed according to the good pleasure of his goodness; even as his promises themselves at first were. And,

(6) Lastly: It is very evident that as to communications of grace and favour, God doth dispense very differently; and therefore, must be understood to intend so to do, and to have always intended it. As in the parable of the talents, (though parabolical scriptures do not give ground of argument as to every thing in them, yet they do as to their main scope,) he gives to one ten talents, to another five, to another one, as he pleaseth; he dispenseth as he pleaseth, wherein he hath not particularly obliged himself. But further,

9. If yet he do actually, in a way of common grace, superadd more, wheresoever he hath given any thing of it, upon the due improvement of that, then we may conclude he hath al-

ways intended so to do; this was his pleasure, and his eternal purpose. If that be actually his rule, “to him that hath shall be given;” (you know how *hath* is to be taken here, that hath so as to improve what he hath,) he shall still have more: if this be actually the rule and measure of his proceedings, it was always his purpose it should be so. And so it must be understood to have been his purpose, even in them that do finally perish, yet still to give them more of gracious communications in the way of common grace, upon the improvement of what they had; and they perish as not improving what was vouchsafed and afforded them, according to the tenour of that rule. They do not finally perish, as never having received any thing from the hands of God, in a way of grace, that had a tendency and leadingness in it to their better state, but they finally perish as neglecting and resisting such overtures as have been made to them. What the case was with the old world, before the flood, we must still suppose to be the common case among men. “My Spirit shall not always strive with man.” Gen. 6. 3. It had been striving, and it is generally striving more or less; and especially where God doth afford the more peculiar manifestations of himself, as he did to that people whom he severed from the rest of the world, to be more appropriate to him. We have many passages that speak of the presence, and of the operations of the Divine Spirit, among that people. The Spirit of the Lord caused them to rest: He gave his Spirit to instruct them. Isaiah 63. 14. They rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore, he turned to be their enemy, and fought against them: ver. 10. and that of dying Stephen, “Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and life, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit, as your fathers did, so do ye.” Acts 7. 51. Now, there cannot be a resistance where there is no striving, and there can be no striving where there is not a counter-striving. When the Spirit, in its more common operations, is resisted, it retires in displeasure, often and most righteously, and gives to men, yields to them that victory that shall be in the end fatal to them, undoing to them; many such victories undo them at last, and they perish by them. If he be actually working in men to will and to do of his own good pleasure, when he is ever so at work in any, he injects thoughts into their hearts, smites their minds with convictions, and their hearts many times with terrors; or if there be any more placid affections raised in them in any degree towards himself, or towards any divine thing, and the matter go no further than a losecable taste, that may vanish and pass away, it is plain he so far went of good pleasure; and if he did that

which he did of good pleasure, then it was before his good pleasure, and always his good pleasure, and eternally his good pleasure, to proceed so far with such and such: so as in this case there can be no pretence to say, if he go no higher, that wrong is done to them with whom he went no higher. It must be justly said, "Friend I do thee no wrong," even to the most careless neglecter, and the most contemptuous abuser of the grace of God, "Friend I do thee no wrong." If he do proceed higher, and to less vincible workings with some, there is no cause any man's eye should be evil, because his eye is good. He is Lord of his own grace, he may do what he will with his own. What he hath to dispense, and dispose of, is his, and they to whom he is to dispose so and so are his, and there is no pretence of wrong to any, that more is not done for them; for whom more was done than they could lay any original claim to; for it was all of mercy that there was any offer or overture made at all, or that the case was so stated before, as that it might have been possible, if it had not been through their own wicked neglect, that they that perish might have advanced in the way of salvation, according to his method, still further and further, so as not to make their own final salvation a thing impossible upon any other terms, than their own wilful neglect and final refusal. But I again further add,

10. That such as live quite without the sound of the gospel, and to whom every thing of supernatural revelation hath never been vouchsafed or any thing of it, how God hath determined to deal with them, and the infants of such, he hath not yet declared further his pleasure to us expressly, than it was needful for us to know and understand. And therefore, it would be either vain or overbold curiosity to determine positively in their case, and it is very unreasonable and foolish, oversolicitously to inquire about it. It is enough for us to understand and know upon what terms God will deal with us, according to those circumstances wherein he hath placed and set us: he hath placed us under the dispensation of his gospel, wherein all things are made plain and evident to us, that concern us in reference to our present and eternal state, and will deal with us according to those known and published terms, which stand in so clear a light, before our eyes; and with all others according to those measures they have had. It is enough for us to understand and know what we may, as our case is stated, expect from God, and what God doth expect from us. And, it would be very unreasonable, and uncharitable, for us to trouble ourselves with further inquiries, and it would be very bold to venture on rash determinations, in those more obscure things, and

wherein we are so little concerned. These are to pass among the arcana, that secret things belong to God, when revealed things belong to us, and our children after us, as they shall come to be revealed to them. Deut. 29. 29. A passage placed, as it were, on purpose to caution, and warn too busy and bold inquirers, and that, even in matters of unspeakably less concernment than the eternal salvation of souls. As suppose, that the people, for that is the case there supposed and referred to, who had been so peculiar to God, taken nigh to him, above, and from, all other people and nations under heaven, should apostatise and revolt from him, and draw down vindictive judgments, and destructive ones upon themselves, and inquiry be made how it comes to pass, that such a people, so near to God, should be so treated and dealt withal, their land laid waste and made a wilderness, and nothing to be found but marks of divine vengeance, where such a people, so favoured by heaven did dwell, what is the meaning of all this? Why, they forsook the Lord their God! But that might have been prevented: Why did he not hold them to him? "Secret things belong unto God, but revealed things to us and our children." So is that sad and dismal state concluded and shut up at last, with that seal upon it! That, therefore, I would leave with you, as all I think needful to say, with reference to their case who lie without the compass of superadded divine revelation. Again, I further add,

11. That whereas faith and its concomitants are ever to be found in that, which appears to be at length the subject of God's purpose of saving souls; and final infidelity, with its concomitants, are the characters of the subjects of the contrary purpose, a purpose to condemn with everlasting destruction; these must very differently be understood to be so. Faith, for instance, and so of the rest of its concomitants, are never looked upon by God as any causes, or conditions, or inducements, any way, of his purpose to save any. These are by his grace to be found in the subjects, in those that he will save; but they are no inducements to pass any such determination concerning them. It is honourable to him to save such: and, even in the nature of the thing, they only are capable of final salvation and blessedness, in whom such characters are to be found: for they can never be happy in union with the eternal truth and goodness, who are habitually averse in their temper, and opposite to the one and the other. If happiness result from such a union, then they, in whom there is a prevailing final aversion to eternal truth and goodness, are incapable of any such felicity, as is to result from a union with these.

But it is no motive or inducement to God, to intend to save such a one, because he will be a believer, or he will be a penitent person. That he is a believer, that he is a penitent person, that he is a lover of him, and that he is obedient to his Son, these are the effects of his grace, and of his good pleasure, and so he is moved in this case by nothing without himself. But the case must be understood to be otherwise, as to those that he intends finally to punish, and to punish with everlasting destruction. That is, he doth resolve to deal with them suitably to the state of things between him and them, and with himself. If any inquire, why there should be a difference, why he should be moved to purpose so and so, in reference to them that perish, (which purpose we are not to consider abstractly as it lies in God alone, for so it is not a distinct thing from his own essence of which there can be no cause; but we are to consider it with a reference to the effects and to the objects, and of that relation there is really a cause, and so there is a just cause for the condemnation of them that perish, even from the creature: but there can be no cause from the creature, of them that are saved) I say, if you will have the reasons assigned of the difference; they are obvious and plain, especially these two.

(1.) That there is no natural connection between the imperfect faith and holiness of the saints, and their eternal felicity; no natural connection, I say, at all between them. But there is a most natural connection between the infidelity, enmity against God, and reigning wickedness, and eternal ruin and everlasting misery. No man can say that these two are naturally connected, an imperfect faith in God, through Christ, and imperfect holiness, and final felicity and blessedness. These are not so naturally connected that the one must arrive to the other. But there is a most plain, natural connection between infidelity and disbelief of divine truth, enmity against divine goodness, repudiation and refusal of the offers and tenders thereof, and eternal misery: so as that the one of them cannot but be the other. Wickedness must be misery, sin persisted in to the last must be destruction, it cannot be otherwise; sin when it is finished can be nothing but death. "To be carnally minded is death:" it is indeed said, "to be spiritually minded is life and peace:" but that is by an intervening divine constitution. And though there be a constitution in the other case too, yet there is a most natural connection between total prevailing wickedness, reigning iniquity, and misery; to which the supervening constitution is added to an in-

dication of the righteous judgment of God, that he doth but let the thing be with such as it is. They love death; and he only lets them have what they love, and what they choose: he doth only not interpose in their case to break the connection. And,

(2.) There is this manifest difference too; that as there is a natural connection between wickedness and misery, whereas there is none between imperfect faith and holiness and eternal felicity, otherwise than what God hath graciously made; so there is in final, reigning, persevering wickedness, the highest desert of eternal misery: whereas, there is in imperfect faith and holiness no desert of eternal life and blessedness. And none that consider, will think this strange, that when a man can never deserve (much less by what is merely gratuitously wrought in him) life and blessedness; yet, by continuing, persevering wickedness he may deserve to perish. That imperfect good that is wrought in him and which he owes not to himself, can never deserve life and blessedness for him. But total wickedness, yea, or any wickedness can deserve death, can deserve for a man's being left to be finally miserable and his falling under divine *vindicta, vengeance*: this is a divine nemesis, what is fit and righteous, what is fit the righteous Judge of all the earth should do; even animadvert upon wickedness, and testify his own just abhorrence and detestation of it, so that there is a vast difference between these two: that though faith and holiness be in those that shall be saved; and so are ever to be found in the subject of God's purpose to save, as characteristic of the subject, but are not inducements, or causes or motives thereof unto God: yet, wheresoever God hath purposed to condemn, their wickedness is a just motive of that purpose, so terminated, so related to the creature, that is, to suffer, and to the suffering that he is to undergo. There is something justly causative in this; and there is nothing more strange in all this, than what God hath himself, in his word, so plainly told us, that men's destruction is of themselves, but their help in order to salvation should be found in him alone. Hos. 13. 9. It is no unsuitable or strange thing, that God should be eyed as the Author of all life, and all grace, and all blessedness, and of life and of felicity for ever. And, that sinners should be looked upon as the fountains of all evil and all darkness and all impurity and all misery to themselves only. God must determine men only to that good by which they are to be led on gradually to a blessed, safe, and happy state. But to that evil that tends to ruin and final destruction, men have it in themselves to determine themselves. More is yet to be added to illustrate this.

LECTURE III.*

But before I proceed further, I think fit to premonish thus much, and declare to you, that I would not, as to these matters, be understood to deny every thing that I do not assert about them, nor to assert whatsoever I do not deny: for my design is only to propose to you what is plain, and what is useable and may be improved unto the common purposes of Christianity. There are a great many things besides, that many have concerned themselves to dispute to and fro, which I think it not at all needful or useful to be brought into such discourse.

But now, that the matter last insisted on, may yet be clearer and more plain. If we speak of this natural bodily life, you can very easily understand that that is in any man's power, it is within the compass of human power that ordinarily men have, for a man to give himself a mortal wound, but, having done so, it is not within the compass of human power to heal him again; and that, in reference to the natural connection between the one of those forementioned things and the other, and in reference to the moral and legal connection that is asserted between them; we may again illustrate it by a resemblance of it to the concernments of this natural bodily life. It is in the power of any one that dares venture to be so far criminal, to deserve death at the hands of the prince and the law, whereas, it may be no way in his power, when he hath done so, to deserve the prince's pardon and to have his forfeited life given him again. These are things, in themselves plain to any understanding. And now, whereas the text hath plainly told us, that God works all things after the counsel of his own will, this doth manifestly imply, that the determinations must be correspondent to the aptitudes of things, and most especially to the apt agreement which they shall hold with the universal perfection of his own nature. Now it is no blemish to the perfection of the Divine Nature, when things are so and so connected in themselves, naturally and morally, to let things in many instances stand just as in themselves they are. This is no reflection on the divine perfection; that is, where there is a real connection between wickedness and misery, both natural and moral or legal, it is no reflection upon the perfection of the Divine Nature, in many instances to let that connection

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be as it is. And whereas, there is no connection between imperfect faith and holiness, and perfect felicity and blessedness, (there is, in reality, no connection between these) it is no blemish to the divine perfection (if there be really, and if there be in nature, and as yet any other way between these two, no connection) to make one by grace, in what instances he pleaseth; that being done (as the gospel tells us) upon the Redeemer's account, who it was predetermined should so order the course of his management, even to dying itself, and in dying, that no divine perfection should reluctate or reclaim against such a connection as this; a connection to be made by grace when before it was not, when really it was not, between that imperfect faith and holiness that some should be enabled to in this world and their future felicity and blessedness in the other world. All comes to this sum, that is, that we can both effect and deserve our own death and misery; but we can neither effect nor deserve life and blessedness: that must be owing to divine favour and grace. And the case (as hath been often said) is vastly different in dispensing of punishments and free favours. It being no reflection upon the best government that can be supposed either to inflict deserved punishments, or to dispense undeserved favours. Neither of these can reflect on the best and most perfect government that can be thought. I now go on and add further,

12. That the assertion of a decree of reprobation, antecedent to a decree of condemnation for infidelity and wickedness persisted in to the last, is that which may seem agreeable to the imperfect mind of man; but we cannot be so sure that it will be any way agreeable unto the most perfect mind of God, in which there can be no such thing as first and second, and unto which all things lie open at once, even unto one entire and eternal view. We are very plainly told in Scripture, of some men's being ordained of old unto condemnation: in that 4th verse of the epistle of Jude, and in the same place we have the characters given us of them that are so: "ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, denying the only Lord God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." We are sure of such a decree as doth doom such, continuing such unto the last, unto condemnation and eternal perdition: but that there should be any decree concerning such, prior to this, that must suppose priority and posteriority in *Eternum*. But *Eternum non patitur novum*, there can be no such thing as novelty, newness, in eternity. And therefore, being sure there is such a decree as this, and that this decree is eternal, we may be equally sure there can be no decree pre-existent to it; because

every thing in God is co-eternal to him, and so this decree must be co-eternal unto God himself; and there can be nothing before God. And though it be very true, indeed, that many have taken much pains and given great exercise to their thoughts to assign and fix some certain order of former and latter, to the divine decrees, yet that doth only proceed from the imperfection of their minds; but we are sure it is impossible there can be any such thing as priority and posteriority in the Divine Mind; all things lying open to him at one eternal and entire view at once: so that whensoever he beholds and looks upon the subjects of final misery, he sees their character at the same time, and it cannot be otherwise. And again, I add,

13. That will or decree, or purpose of God by which he doth determine the salvation of any, it is, in the proper time and season, effective of whatsoever is pre-requisite thereunto: that is, if he have decreed he will save such and such, that same will of his is, in the proper season, effective of that faith, of that repentance, of that holiness and of that perseverance which is requisite to their final salvation. But, on the other hand, God's will to punish any with future misery is not effective of what concurs to that, neither as naturally causing or deserving it. That is sin that doth both, as you have heard; it doth both naturally cause it and deserve it too. And, if you ask here, "What is the reason of the difference; or is there not a parity of reason in both cases, that if his will doth effect what is necessary to the salvation of the one, his will should also effect what is necessary or doth any ways previously concur to the destruction of the other? The reason of the difference is most manifest upon these two accounts.

(1.) That sin is properly, as such, no effect but a defect, and therefore, it doth not need an effective cause but a defective only. But we will impute nothing of defectiveness to God: that can be found no where but in the creature. And,

(2.) That we can (sure any one may) apprehend it a great deal more congruous and suitable, to the nature and honour of God to make men believing and holy than to make them unbelieving and wicked. We can easily apprehend how well it agrees to the nature of God, and how subservient it is to the glory of God, to make men believing and holy; but no man can ever apprehend it agreeable to his nature, or subservient to his honour, to make men disbelieving and wicked. And therefore, as we make the difference, I cannot but apprehend you see reason enough why we should. And then further, take this,

14. That for these distinct states of blessedness and misery, unto which the will of God doth determine some, and leave others, they are the only states of men hereafter, and there is not a middle state between these two, though there be great intermediate degrees between the highest pitch of felicity and the lowest of misery. There are, I say, very great intermediate degrees, but not a middle state. This proposition hath two parts:—that there is no middle state, and yet—that there are great intermediate degrees, both of blessedness and misery.

(1.) As to the former part, that there is no intermediate or middle state between these two: it cannot, without very great absurdity, be so much as conceived there should be; besides that it is against the most express tenour of Scripture. I need not go about to quote texts to you. Look to the judgment of the great day. Matt. 25. Men are judged but to two distinct states; all go one of these two ways. And it is unconceivable in itself that there should be a distinct intermediate state: for it would be to suppose that there can be such a thing as an intelligent, reasonable creature, having the use of his faculties, (which death, we have a great deal more reason to apprehend, doth promote rather than hinder,) and neither happy nor miserable. This is an unconceivable thing, equally unconceivable as it would be, that there should be such a creature under a law, under government, (as reasonable creatures even as such, either positive or natural at least,) that should be neither good nor bad, that should neither be obedient nor disobedient, holy nor wicked, and this you know to be an impossible thing. And that is enough as to the former part of the proposition. But then,

(2.) As to the latter part, that there are great intermediate degrees both of happiness and misery, that is plain from most express scriptures. It is less needful to insist upon the degrees of blessedness in the other state, about which the Scripture is plain enough. There will be such a difference as there appears to be of one star differing from another star in glory. 1 Cor. 15. 41. But chiefly as to the differing degrees of misery; nothing is plainer from such passages in Scripture:—“They that know their master’s will, and do it not, shall be beaten with many stripes; they that do it not, not knowing it, with fewer.” Luke 12. 47, 48. “It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, for Tyre and Sidon, in the day of judgment, than for Capernaum and Bethsaida, where so much gospel light shone; and where so glorious works were done, to evidence and demonstrate the truth of the gospel.” Matt. 11. 22.

And there is a sort among them that do perish, which do perish more dreadfully. Such and such, it is said, shall have their portion with hypocrites, (Matt 24. 51.) which must be supposed the most fiery, in the worst and hottest hell. God will not lay upon men more than is right, that any should enter into judgment with him, as the expression in Job is. And therefore, we must suppose the case to be vastly different between them that live under the gospel and them that do not. "They that sin without law, shall perish without law;" (Rom. 2. 12.) but with a gentler kind of perdition. But they that sin under the law, that is, under the divine Revelation, for that is the meaning of the law there, supernatural, divine Revelation, they shall be judged by it: not by that light which they have not, or those means of light which they never had, but by those which they have. But whereas, there will be very great degrees of difference in the states of the miserable hereafter, how great that difference will be, that we know not. It is enough that we know it will be very great; and therefore, among them that are miserable, none will be punished unsuitably to the demerit of their own sins. And this ought to have its weight with us, in order to the repressing of undue and hard thoughts concerning the divine proceedings with men in the final judgment: and so, concerning his purposes and determinations before, and from, eternity.

But I think it not necessary to say more to you by way of position; yet, there are sundry things that I shall add by way of *caution*. As,

1. That we should take heed of being too positive about any of these things, beyond the measure of divine Revelation, or too curious in inquiring, or too contentious in disputing about such matters. Let us labour to lay a restraint upon our spirits as to these things. The matter requires it, and the divine word requires it.

2. Never depart from, nor doubt of, what God hath expressly revealed: in reference to what he hath expressly revealed, let us neither deviate nor doubt; but take heed lest we do. And,

3. Take heed that we do not oppose the secret and revealed will of God to one another, or allow ourselves so much as to imagine an opposition, or contrariety between them. And that ground being once firmly laid and stuck to, as it is impossible that there can be a will against a will in God, or that he can be divided from himself, or against himself, or that he should reveal any thing to us as his will, that is not his will, (it being a thing inconsistent with his nature, and impossible to him to

lie,) that being, I say, firmly laid, (as nothing can be firmer or surer than that,) then measure all your conceptions of the secret will of God, by his revealed will, about which you may be sure. But never measure your conceptions of his revealed will by his secret will; that is, by what you may imagine concerning that. For you can but imagine, while it is secret, and so far as it is unrevealed.

4. Take heed of exalting any one divine perfection to the depressing of another, which men are too prone to do in their more fervent disputes about these matters. Great heat and zeal appear to vindicate such a particular divine perfection without attending, that at the same time they intrench upon some other. It were very easy to give instances. Some on the one hand are so much for the magnifying of the goodness of God, his love and his justice, (as they think,) that they quite overlook his sovereignty, make nothing of that, but guide their thoughts by such measures, as if they thought, that God was obliged by his goodness, or even by his justice, to do so with his own creatures, whom he hath so freely produced and brought forth into being out of nothing, as they may do with their fellow creatures. As if God were bound to observe the same measures as they do, and had no more power and dominion over the works of his own hands, than they have over one another, who cannot give one another so much as a moment's breath. And on the other hand, some are so over apt to exalt and magnify the divine sovereignty, that they quite forget to consider him as a wise and righteous and holy and good God; in all these, the best and most perfect of beings. This is quite forgot, and scarce any other notion doth actually obtain; though otherwise these are not denied, are only not denied; but in the mean time they are overlooked; and so hardly any other notion is brought in view, or upon the stage concerning God, than as of an almighty will, quite against the manifest scope and current of the Scripture every where, which makes all excellencies to be in him, and magnifies his wisdom, and his righteousness, and his love and goodness, at so high a rate, as you know. But to suppose the Divine Nature to consist but in an omnipotent will, not guided by wisdom and counsel, as the text speaks, "He doth all things according to the counsel of his own will:" is the strangest and most unshapen notion of God; and, in the tendency of it, most destructive to religion that can be conceived. It tends, indeed, to engender in the minds of men, a certain dread and horror: but is that the affection that is to influence religion, and to animate our worship? There can be no worship that doth not proceed

from a dutiful reverential love : and agreeable hereunto, must be still our notions of God. Heathens themselves that speak at so high a rate (some of them) of the divine excellencies, and particularly of his goodness, exalting that far above his power, and above his knowledge, and above his wisdom ; yet they, at the same time, say of him, “ He is an impartial law ; ” and they comprehend in that, both goodness and righteousness, according to the strict measures whereof he manageth the whole course of his dispensations towards his creatures, and cannot but do so. He is a law that equally inclines every way, an impartial law he is to himself in all his dispensations. And indeed, such love and goodness in a ruler, as should include in it an insensibleness of injuries and indignities, and affronts, it were stupidity ; it were inconsistent with the proper governing qualifications which are requisite in any ruler whatsoever. And again,

5. Take this further by way of caution : Let us take very great heed that we do not, in reference to these things, so magnify human perfection as to depress divine ; for that, in this affair, too many are apt to do ; that is, to ascribe so much to the reason and will of man, as to detract most injuriously from the counsel of the will of God. Some think they know not how to solve the difficulties in these affairs, without ascribing greatly and highly to the reason and will of man. And all ought to be ascribed thereunto that is due ; that is, so much as doth render a man a governable creature, capable of being bound by a law, and of being dealt with in the way of moral government. So much must be ascribed and ought to be so. It would be otherwise, as fit and congruous to have given laws, and assigned rewards and punishments to beasts and trees, as men, if we do not preserve the apprehension of man’s capacity to be the subject of government, by reason and will, wherewith God hath endowed his nature. But to think that the reason and will of man are, of themselves, enough to enable him to all that is requisite to his future felicity, is to make a god of him, instead of a man, and to put him into his Maker’s throne, to give him a self-sufficiency, as if he had enough in himself to do all things. And this, indeed, is so to magnify the reason and will of man, as upon the matter to nullify the counsel of the divine will in reference unto him ; by which we find the methods are described and set, in which he is to expect continual aids and assistances, as being of himself, without them, able to do nothing. And,

6. Take heed, hereupon, of being tempted to take up with a spiritless religion, that shall be only a human product, the ef-

fect only of a man's own power. Take heed of taking up such a repentance, and such a faith, and such an obedience as the power of man is sufficient for: that will certainly lurch men at last. That repentance, and that faith, and that holiness, (if any other were to have the names,) which is not produced by the Divine Spirit, but is short of that, must needs leave men short of heaven and eternal glory; unless you would suppose it possible to a man to be his own Saviour out of such a gulf of sin and misery as men are sunk into.

7, Take heed of admitting any distrustful thoughts, that God will not be always ready to afford his communicated, superadded light and influence to those that see and acknowledge their own impotency and nothingness. Such as see themselves lost, and unable to help themselves, and that, from a sense of indigency and want, cry for his Spirit (even as for bread) to enlighten them and empower them, and enable them to do his will, to comply with his call, and come up to his terms of life and blessedness: take heed of ever admitting a distrustful thought concerning his readiness to impart and communicate to such. He will give his Spirit to them that ask him; when he is considerately asked and sought to: not formally, not slightly, not in words of course; but as feeling our own blindness and darkness and deadness and impotency: or where there is not, as yet, the light of a saint, there is that of a man, and that is to be improved and made use of, in order to our higher light, and if there be that self-reflection to which God hath given to every man a natural ability, much more may be known than usually is. It belongs to the nature of man to turn his eyes inwards. The mind of a man (like the sun can only project its beams and cast them about this way and that, and every way,) the mind of a man, I say, as an intellectual sun, can turn its beams inward upon itself and take cognizance of what is done within him; and what dispositions and indispositions are within. Men can reflect and consider this with themselves: "Have not I an aversion towards God? have not worldly concerns and affairs, by the natural inclination of my own mind, a greater room and place there than heaven and the things of heaven? are not other thoughts more grateful? and have they not a more pleasant relish with me than the thoughts of God?" Men, I say, are capable of using such reflections as these. And thereupon, of considering, "This can never be well with me: if there remain with me an habitual aversion to God, who must be my best and eternal good, I cannot but be eternally miserable: if I cannot think of him, and converse with him with inclination and pleasure, I am lost. If my blessed-

ness lie above, in another world, and my mind is carried continually downward towards this world, I must have a heart attuned to heaven, or I can never come there. Well then let me try if I can change the habit of my own mind, make the attempt, make the trial." The more you attempt and try, the more you will find that of yourselves you cannot; you can do nothing of yourselves, you do but lift at a heavy log, you attempt to move a mountain upwards, when you would lift at your own terrene hearts. Then, is this consideration obvious, "I must have help from heaven, or I shall never come there." Therefore, fall a seeking, fall a supplicating, as one that apprehends himself in danger to perish and be lost, if he have not another heart, a believing heart, a holy heart, a heavenly heart. God will in this case give his Spirit; and of that, you are not to despair by any means. Take heed therefore, of setting the imagination of a secret will of God not to give his Spirit, against his plain and most expressly revealed will, that he will give his Spirit to them that ask it, that is, that do considerately ask it, as apprehending the state of their case; not ask it slightly and in mockery, so as that the manner of their asking to have the Divine Spirit given should imply a contempt of the gift at the same time.

LECTURE IV.*

And I will add, further, to this caution, that we take very great heed that we do not remit either our diligence, or our hope, in reference to the affairs of our salvation, upon the supposition of any divine counsel or purpose lying against us; and to enforce this, (than which nothing is more necessary to be enforced,) I might reason two ways, partly *ad hominem*, partly, *ad rem*.

(1.) *Ad hominem*. That is, from the common apprehension and practice of men in reference to other cases. It is very plain that all the other concerns of men, are as much determined by divine counsel and decree, as the affairs and concerns of their souls and future estate. But it is as plain that men are not wont to suspend their actions, in common cases, upon mere supposition of such purposes and counsels of God, that may, for ought they know, lie against them in such cases. It would make very strange work in the world if they should; if men should suspend their actions in reference to

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common affairs of human life merely upon the supposition that a decree may be against them. What a condition would it reduce things to among men on earth! The whole world would be at a stand, or would be sitting still, and would sit still in very uneasy postures too. The husbandman must never plough nor sow, for he might say, "I do not know but there is a decree against me, that all will come to nothing, I shall have no crop, I shall lose all my labour and expence." The merchant should never send or go to sea; no man should ever make a meal, because he doth not know but that it may be determined that it shall poison and not nourish him, choke him and not refresh him. Men should not walk the streets, for they do not know but that there may be some decree or other that a tile shall fall and strike them dead, or they may meet with a stab in their walk: nor should they sit still in the house neither, for they do not know but that there may be such a decree that the house may fall and bury them in the ruins. Plain it is, men do not in common cases suspend their actions upon such suppositions; but then it argues very great insincerity, and a very ill temper of mind, that men should only pick out their weightiest and most important concerns, and do nothing in reference to them, merely upon such an imagination that there may be some purpose, or something in the divine counsel lying against them. It argues, I say, a very ill mind; that there is some peculiar disaffection to God, and to the way of holiness and to religion as such, that men should only lay themselves under restraint in reference to those great concernments of religion, when they have as much cause, and the same pretence in reference to all things as they have in reference to this. And again,

(2.) We may argue *Ad rem*, or from the true, real state of the case itself; that is, that there is no supposable divine purpose but what is guided by counsel, and that no one hath any reason to fear that the divine counsel can be any way prejudicial to him, even to an honest affair or undertaking, that belongs to the human life itself. For they are always to be considered as the counsels of an absolutely, infinitely perfect Being, whose nature is incapable of any thing of malignity towards his creatures; (for it is the most perfect benignity and goodness itself, "God is love;") and therefore, that any supposable counsel of the divine will, in reference to our common affairs themselves, are a great deal more encouraging than they can be discouraging; yea, unspeakably more, in reference to these affairs, supposing we will but take up due thoughts of God about them, and have correspondent, due dispositions of heart and spirit to-

wards him : for we are pre-assured by his own express word, that all things shall work together for good to those that love God ; which love, will be the evidence of a man's being called according to his purpose, as these things lie connected in that Rom. 8. 28. There is no son or servant of common understanding and ingenuity, but it will be a very great encouragement and satisfaction to him to act in all things under the conduct and direction of a parent or master, that he knows to be a man of counsel, as well as of the greatest goodness ; it will certainly be most satisfying and encouraging to any such one. And how unspeakably more will it be to any, to think, that whatsoever affairs that lie within the compass of human life, I have to manage, I am to manage and order them all under the conduct and direction of the wise counsel of a good, and gracious, and holy God ; whence I may be sure he will never hinder me in any such enterprize and undertaking of mine, unless it appear to his infinite wisdom, that it will be to my hurt, that it will turn to my prejudice. If it shall be for the best for me, it shall succeed, if it shall not succeed, it would be to my disadvantage if it should. The tendency of all this is to compose men's spirits to the greatest quietude and tranquillity imaginable, in reference even to the common affairs of human life. This word is firmer and more stable than the foundations of heaven and earth, that all things shall work together for good to them that love God : nothing can come amiss to a lover of God, to one, who by the Divine Spirit working in him, is contempered in the habitual frame of his spirit to the divine pleasure. And the disposition of all things cannot but work together for good to such a one.

But, whereas, it may be said, "What if I do not love God ? what if I find not that disposition in my heart and soul to him, what shall I do then ?" Why,

[1.] I would appeal to such a one, How perverse a notion must you needs have of God, if you think him to be such a one that he should equally take care, that all things should work together for good to men, whether they love him or love him not ? that he should as much gratify them that hate him, as them that love him ! You must suppose, in this case, somewhat in its own nature impossible : for it is simply impossible that any thing can succeed well with a man that loves not God. He must be the son of peace, or good cannot come to him : it can take no place in him. But what I have further to say is this, which in the second place I designed to say in arguing this matter *ad rem*. That is,

[2.] That supposing a man be not a lover of God, an ha-

bitual lover of him, so as he can discern this to be the predominant governing principle in him; yet he hath greater encouragement in reference to the affairs of his soul, (supposing them to lie in this state,) than he can have in reference to his external estate here in this world. For do we ever find any such promises in the word of God, that whosoever labours to be rich shall be rich? or that he that takes care of his health shall be always healthy; as we have, that he that labours to be saved shall have help from heaven in order thereunto? “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God worketh in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure.” Phil. 2. 12, 13. He is working: (so the word signifies :) what he doth herein, he doth according to good pleasure, and he is still doing and working in you. Therefore, there can be no purpose or counsel in the divine will, lying against this plain word of his. So that none can have any pretence to be less laborious, less diligent in reference to the affairs of their souls, than they have in reference to their common affairs. Yea, there is a great deal of reason why they should be much more, and that they should conjoin hope with their diligence in reference thereunto; which I mention in this conjunction, because we find them so conjoined in Scripture; and they are conjoined in the nature of the thing. We find them conjoined, Heb. 6. 11. “That ye shew the same diligence unto the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises.” And in the nature of the thing, there can be no diligence where there is no hope; where there is much of hope, there will be much of diligence. There is no reason that either should languish: there is the greatest reason why both should be lively and vigorous, and make each other so, even upon the supposition of what lies in the mind and purpose of God, in reference to the affairs of souls. And then, I further add by way of caution,

8. That we do not overlook the advantages that may be made of agreements among them that do controvert this same thing. That is, the purposes and counsels of God touching the salvation of men, or touching the punishment of them who shall be found the fit subjects of his punitive justice in another state. Let us not overlook the advantage that may be made of what is in this matter agreed on all hands; that is, it is on all hands agreed, that no good man shall ever perish. This is a thing wherein all do consent and agree. And truly, what there is of difference, it is so very notional and little, in comparison of this, that here we have what should quiet our minds, yea, and it is fur-

ther agreed, that for them that are wicked, they have always still means for making them better, more than ever they improve or make use of; and that God doth afford no such means to any unwillingly; therefore, always according to his will, and the counsel of his will; and consequently, that this must be found the case at last, that none do finally perish but such as have refused and rejected the overtures, or misimproved, or not improved the means that they had in order to their being saved. Though they had not all at once what was necessary to the saving of them, they had always reason to apprehend, that if they had used what they had, they should have had still more. And such agreements as these are by no means to be overlooked. We should labour to make the greatest advantage of them that the matter admits of. Yea, and it is further agreed, that this world is very wicked; and it cannot but be agreed, that God could make it generally better if he would, and therefore, it ought to be as generally agreed, that he hath something in his wise counsel whence it doth appear to him less fit to exert his almightiness to this purpose. Or, if any should expect he should do so, or wonder he doth not so, they have as much reason to wonder why he did not, by almightiness, shut sin out of the world at first, and why he did not, by his almighty power, (as he might,) prevent the apostasy or fall, either of the angels that fell, or of the universality of men that fell all at once, and are all in a fallen state ever since.

I shall not further insist as to matter of useful caution which in these several particulars hath been given you. But I shall add to these, some *alleviating considerations*, that may help to make things sit more easily on our minds, relating to this great and important subject. As,

1. Consider this, that all the purposes or determinations of the divine will, they are the products of counsel. That the text assures us, that whatsoever he doth, he doth according to the counsel of his own will, whereupon, as to the secret purposes and determinations of the divine will which therefore we know not, because they are secret, we have all the reason imaginable to think, that they must be most unexceptionable from that we do know, that they are all purposes guided by most unerring counsel, and which, whilst we know not in particular what they are, we have nothing to do but reverentially to adore, as the apostle doth in Rom. 11. 33. "O! the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." That part remains, to adore, with a dutiful adoration, what we do not distinctly and particularly understand, and, indeed, cannot understand. There

is no government but hath its arcana; and it would be very inept and foolish for us to imagine, that there should be no secrets belonging to the divine government. But admit that there be, inasmuch as they do belong to the divine government, the government of God; that name is a name that comprehends all perfection, and excludes all imperfection; contains nothing in it but what is most excellent and perfect in all respects; and therefore, of this, in the general, we may rest most assured, that there can be nothing exceptionable in those purposes of his will which we do not particularly know. And,

2. Let us but consider, that for his known and public counsels, they carry their own recommendableness in them to every mind, understanding and conscience of man, that shall consider. Do but bethink yourselves, what is given us as the summary of the whole counsel of God which is published and declared to apostate, fallen man. The apostle tells the Ephesians, (Acts 20. 21.) that he had made it his business to testify to them, “repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” And in having done so, he tells them (ver. 27.) that he had made known to them the whole counsel of God. Now, I beseech you, what could have been more suitable to the state of apostate, fallen creatures than to say, it is the counsel of God, they should repent, that they should turn to him. And since it was impossible they should return and be accepted, but upon the account of a Mediator and Redeemer who was to bring them to God, and reconcile them to him, what could be more suitable, than that this should be stood upon, wheresoever he is revealed and made known, that men should believe in him; that is, absolutely resign and subject themselves to his saving mercy, and to his governing power? Here is the whole counsel of God, here it is summed up. And what hath any man to say to this? why, being an apostate creature, he should not turn and repent? and why, not being able to satisfy divine justice by himself, but having one revealed to him that hath fully done it, (so as to leave that none of his part) why he should not entrust his soul with him, and cast it upon him, and subject it to his conduct and government, by known and prescribed and most unexceptionable rules? And whereas, men cannot turn of themselves, (it is true,) they have not at present sufficient power in their own hand, it is all one, whether they have it, or may have it, if they do apply themselves. This is a part of the counsel of God too, that he is always ready to assist a returning soul: “Turn ye at my reproof, I will pour out my Spirit upon you.” Prov. 1. 21. This is part of his counsel: for they that do not so, are, in the next

verse, said to have set at nought his counsel: "But they have set at nought my counsel and despised all my reproof." How unexceptionable are the counsels that are made known, and that are published and declared to us! And,

3. Consider, that if this be the declared, published counsel of God, which you have heard, that he would have apostate creatures return, and is intent upon it that they should do so, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 18.) and is always assisting to their return,—“turn ye at my reproof, apply yourselves, set about it, I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words unto you:” I say, if this be his declared, published counsel, we are sure there can be no repugnant, contrary secret counsel. There can be no contrariety between his declared and his secret counsel. It were monstrous idolatry, that we should form in our own minds, instead of a Deity, an apprehension that he is made up of repugnancies and inconsistencies with himself. And again,

4. Let us but consider, how things would lie under God's present view, supposing that we did not recur and run back into a foregoing eternity, supposing things to lie as they are in their present state, under the present and immediate view of God, only, without conceiving an eternal counsel and an eternal purpose concerning any such thing: and consider with yourselves how matters should lie then; that is, but thus, that whereas, God hath such an order of creatures, intelligent creatures, inhabiting this world, who have all apostatized, fallen, and gone off from him, and by the natural tendency of their course, are universally running themselves into misery, and sinking lower and lower, ready to be engulfed of endless and eternal misery: he beholds these from the throne of his glory above; he sends forth plain, general significations of the pity and compassion he hath towards his creatures; directs his invitations to all the ends of the earth to look to him that they may be saved: if the express revelation do not reach all, it is they themselves, through their own wickedness, that do obstruct and hinder the diffusion of it, otherwise the gospel had spread and flown like lightning from one quarter and end of the world to another, many an age ago, and still from age to age; but yet, plain significations that God is not irreconcilable to his fallen creatures, are more or less afforded every where; he doth not leave himself without witness in that he doth men good; he is kind to them; doth not treat them as an implacable God; makes his sun to shine, and his rain to fall upon the evil and the good, as in that context we so lately discoursed of to you. He

is secretly striving with them, as his Spirit strove with the old world before the flood. "My Spirit (saith God) shall not always strive with man;" implying, that it had been striving, even with that wicked world before. And after the same rate he is dealing with men still. They despise the riches of his patience and goodness and long-suffering, many of them: suppose they do so more generally, he yet, by a merciful and more powerful hand takes hold of some, and saith (as it were) "Though you are inclined and disposed all to perish alike, I will have a relict from among you out of the hand and power of the destroyer:" and he hath finally a numerous remnant; more than any tongue can number, as we find the matter represented how it will be in the close and period of things; we do not know how vastly numerous they may yet be, or have been in former ages and successions of time. But they that perish, perish by their own wilful refusal of offered mercy, whether more expressly, or whether by more tacit, yet intelligible inclinations. Let but things be considered now as lying before God, obvious to one present view, Who hath any thing to say against God's method of procedure in this case? Who hath not cause to adore his grace and goodness and clemency in all this, though so great numbers finally perish? and then, how easy is the step further, if things to one present view do lie so very unexceptionably, what is there more of exception, supposing this view to have been eternal? If things be very fair thus, under one present view, will they lie worse, if it were a day earlier, or a month or a year earlier, or an age or from eternity? What is itself right and well, is eternally so, and was eternally so, and can never have been otherwise. And therefore, it is very vain and foolish for men to amuse their minds, and affright themselves with the thoughts of future and eternal counsels, that may have lain this way or that: if things look well to a present view, how can they look worse to an eternal one. And again, consider,

5. That things should lie thus open to the eternal view of God, all at once, in all their dependencies and connections and referenes to one another, certainly, it is owing only to his perfections, that they should do so, and that they do so. Is it not a greater perfection to foresee and to foreknow all things, and to have forelaid all one's designs, than to foreknow nothing before hand? and to do nothing without foregoing, previous design? How unreasonable is it for us to think the worse of God for that he is more perfect! It is very unreasonable to suppose that he should not foreknow what will become of you and me in our eternal state; that he should not foreknow what the condition of that creature he hath made shall be to eterni-

ty. And whatsoever he doth actually make it to be, in point of felicity, by his own grace, or whatsoever he lets it be, in point of misery, by its own demerit, and the depraved inclination of its own nature, it is certainly his perfection to know the one and the other; and to do whatsoever he doth, willingly and with design, not unwillingly, or as if he could be imposed upon, or forced in any thing. Do but seriously consider how unreasonable it is to think the worse, or have the blacker thoughts of God, for that which is nothing else but his perfection. It would certainly be an imperfection to be nescient, and not to know what will become of things, and what will become of men: and so, to act incogitantly and without previous design, were a great imperfection. Is he then less fit to govern us, and to dispose of us and his creatures, for his being more perfect? And again,

6. Consider how things will lie in the judgment of the great day. We know the rule of his final procedure in that day, which is called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God," that he will give "eternal life to them that by patient continuance in well-doing seek for honour and glory and immortality: and indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish to those that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness." Rom. 2. 5, 6. To none but perverse and persevering evil doers, none but such as refused to obey the truth and were contentious against it, and did obey unrighteousness, did give themselves up to the judgment of an unrighteous spirit and principle, ruling and working in them, to none else but these, "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish." If things will be very unexceptionable in the judgment of the great day, (as who can have any thing to say against this rule or this method of procedure) he will then, in the judgment of the great day, both do as he purposed before; and his purpose will no way be found to have differed from the measure of his final procedure. And again consider,

7. That there cannot but a conviction go with the final issue of things, in the very souls and consciences of them that perish. They do foreknow the righteous judgment of God, that they that do such and such things are worthy of death; are worthy of misery. Pagans themselves do so, for to them the apostle speaks and refers in that; Romans, in the close of the chapter. And what convictions will be upon the consciences of men in the final issue of things, is sufficiently intimated in that, their principal sting is plainly enough and sufficiently intimated to be from their own consciences. There is the worm that never dies. And it were impossible this hold could be

taken on the consciences of men, if it did not appear to them that they were finally guilty of their own ruin. All such imaginations must vanish and fly away of course, that it was impossible things should ever be otherwise with them than they are; that they were doomed unavoidably into that state into which they are come. Whatsoever might be a fence to keep off the stroke from their consciences, you must be sure will all vanish and be gone, and therefore, can have no place. And then lastly,

8. Consider the high and everlasting approbation that all God's methods will have with the most clarified, refined minds of angels and saints, in all that vast general assembly made up of "the innumerable company of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect;" all agreeing in admiring and applauding the most unexceptionable righteousness of all God's dispensations; whereof the counsel of his will were the measure: "Just and true are thy ways, marvellous are thy works Lord God Almighty." And here will be no dark mind, no clouded understanding, no erroneous thought, no vitiating prejudice. If therefore, we are sure all things will to eternity lie well and right to the most perfect minds and understandings, then they are righteous in themselves: and being in themselves right, they ought to be so estimated and judged of by us. Certainly, these things cannot be mistaken, cannot be misunderstood and misapprehended by those pure and glorious creatures in the other state; those bright and unclouded minds that will see nothing but loveliness and beauty, and what is most highly praiseworthy and admirable in the eternal view that they shall have of them. Therefore, to shut up all for the present, let me but leave these two words of direction.

(1.) Labour to cherish the love of God in your souls. That will commend to you all his counsels and all his methods. Love will never think amiss. And,

(2.) Form your apprehensions concerning him, agreeably, that so you may have nothing in your minds to damp your love; nothing may disaffect you unto him. The understanding and the will (such is the constitution of the human nature) do interchangeably work upon one another: the more we love God, the better we shall think of him, and the better we think of him, the better we shall love him. These things circulate between one another. And nothing can be of higher and greater consequence: for if we do otherwise we shall cramp religion in ourselves; and so far as we propagate the ill sentiment, we shall hinder the propagating and diffusing of religion among others. And do but take this deeply to heart.

(perhaps I may have more reason to speak to it hereafter,) that in the latter days wherein, it is said, religion must flourish in the world, (Hosea 3. 5.) men are to “fear the Lord and his goodness.” Most certain it is, in those days, (if there are such days yet to come better than we have seen,) thus it must be, there must be a universal diffusion of good thoughts concerning God. This is that knowledge of God that must replenish the world, and fill the earth, and transform the minds of men, and overcome their fierce, savage humours and dispositions, their disaffection towards God, and their barbarities towards one another; make them “beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” The revealed and acknowledged will of God, and goodness of God prevailing against the evil of the mind and hearts of men. “They shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.” Their thoughts and apprehensions of God will be so persuasive to their own hearts, and they will look upon him according to that kind and amiable and lovely representation of himself that shall captivate all minds and hearts; and make men hate nothing but themselves, and that they have not sooner and more loved God.

LECTURE V.*

Thus we have fully spoken to these words as they concern the spiritual and eternal state of men, which is the apostle’s principal scope as you may see, in the foregoing part of the chapter, and of the same verse; “having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” verse 5. And here, “according to the purpose of him that worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will,” But you see, that from that special consideration of the counsel or purpose of his own will, or the good pleasure thereof, the apostle makes a very easy, natural transition unto this more general proposition which comprehends all that could be said, including the former in it, and much more. And therefore, having spoken to the more limited object already, of the counsel of the divine will, I shall proceed to speak somewhat of the counsel of God’s will concerning the other affairs of men, besides those of their souls or of their eternal state.

And though it be very true that God’s agency about all

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these outward concernments of men, do belong to another head of theology, that is, his providence; yet, the counsel of his will, according whereunto that agency is directed about these affairs, as well as those others that we have already spoken to, comes properly under our consideration here. And therefore, to that I shall speak somewhat briefly; to wit, the counsel of the divine will respecting the present concernments of men in the world, so far as it may be needful and useful to us; that so we may detract nothing from God, that doth truly and rightfully belong to him, and that we may not lose the advantage of the pleasant sentiments and relishes which we may have ourselves, and in our own spirits from the right stating of this matter, which we shall, therefore, endeavour as much as in us is. And shall in speaking of it do these four things—speak of the extent of the object about which the counsel of the divine will is said to be conversant—of the counsel of the divine will itself, its nature and significancy in reference to that object or sort of objects that we are now to consider—give you briefly the reasons why we are to ascribe such a thing to God as counsel and purpose touching these affairs of ours, and—labour to shew you, that no ill consequence can reasonably and justly, be drawn from hence.

I. The extent of the object: sure we are not otherwise to circumscribe it than the letter of the text; **WHO WORKETH ALL THINGS.** For that special sort of object, the souls of men, and their spiritual and eternal state, we have spoken to already, which falls within the compass and comprehension, you plainly enough see, in the general expression in the text. And having spoken to that, even all other concernments besides we must understand to be within the compass of the object too: and therefore, that the counsel of the divine will is conversant about them; that is, whatsoever he hath any agency about, about that also, the counsel of his will hath place, for “he worketh *all* things according to the counsel of his will.” He doth nothing unwillingly, he wills nothing unadvisedly: therefore, whereas all things lie under his agency, all things lie under the counsel of his will.

More especially, whatsoever he hath made any law about; in reference to whatsoever he hath given us rules and precepts, these are called counsels often, and often in Scripture: they are the counsels and mandates of his will. These all lie under the counsel of his will.

There is no state or condition that men can be in, in this world, but there are regulations and precepts given in reference thereto. Whatsoever is matter of threatening or of promise,

the sanctions annexed to his precepts, (as there are many things of threatening and promise that are of temporal concernments,) these still must be considered as being within the same compass. Whatsoever may be matter of affliction or of comfort, whatsoever may have in it any thing of blessing, or any thing of cursing, (as there are temporal blessings and temporal curses besides the eternal ones,) all these, we must understand to be consulted of, in the sense we formerly opened unto you, excluding all the imperfections, and including all the perfection that can be any way conceived or signified by it.

Moreover, all the private concernments of men, personal and domestic; the concernments of the world, of kingdoms and nations, political concernments: the concernments of the church of God in the world, which may be considered under the measure of time; they are all to be considered within the object of divine purpose and counsel.

The more private, personal or domestic concernments of men; they belong to this object, and cannot be excluded. The time of every one's coming into this world, and the time of his going out of it: the "time to be born, and the time to die;" they lie under the determination of the divine counsel, directive of his will: even touching them, there is a time for every purpose under the sun. These, among the rest, "a time to be born and a time to die." Eccles. 3. 2. Skipping over (as it were) the intervening time, as if that were little worth the notice: yet only not noting it there, but in the mean time not excluding it neither, as is evincible enough from many other texts. But it is to be observed, (if you compare that with another passage in the same book: chap. 8. 6.) as to every purpose, there belongs a season, so to every season there belongs judgment; to every purpose there is time and judgment. That must, undoubtedly, primarily, mean divine judgment, which is the perfection of counsel; that which with men is the result of counsel, and which therefore, must signify somewhat analogous with God: there is the judgment of wisdom and counsel, that is determinative of every season, every time, for whatsoever purpose, or occurrence that falls out to any of the sons of men. And the time between these two times, the time of their being born, and the time when they are to die: that lies under the same determination. His days and months and years are all set and appointed; as it is fully expressed in Job 14. 6.

And so the conditions of men, while they are here in this world, whether they shall be high or low; whether they shall be rich or poor; every one hath his dimension, his al-

allowance ordered for him; and no doubt therefore, pre-ordained. Whatsoever portion any man hath of the things of this life, whether it be more, or whether it be less, it is all given. Even what the ravens have, the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field, it is all given: and much more what every man hath, is by the divine allowance and vouchsafement. To every living thing he gives what is convenient and suitable for the support of that life which he had given it before. But what he gives, he gives willingly, not against his will. And what he did once will, (as you formerly heard,) he could not but ever will, and there can be no new one with him.

And how particular persons do branch into families; this all lies under the particular direction even of divine counsel and purpose. And so, what allotments such and such families shall have; and those as they multiply and do increase, "even unto nations and kingdoms," as you see, Acts 17. 26. As God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth; so he hath determined the times of all, and appointed the very bounds of their habitations; assigned to every one his place where he shall be. It hath been the matter of the counsel of the divine will, even concerning us, that our lot should fall in such and such a part of the world: that we should dwell so much of our time in such a place; that our lot should be cast in England, or for so long a time in London; and in what circumstances and with what advantages one way or other. All these things, as they have been ordered by the great Lord of all, so they are not ordered by him incogitantly, but according to the eternal counsel and purpose that are understood to have passed concerning us. The very meanest things that can any way belong to us, or belong to this world, being expressly mentioned to come under the divine cognizance and care; it is plain such concernments as these cannot be excluded. As when we are told, all the hairs of our heads are numbered; and that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without our heavenly Father. And that is our Saviour's reasoning from hence, "Are not ye of more value than they, than many sparrows?" Now, if these things be the matter of the very care and agency of providence, they must have been the matter of an eternal purpose and counsel, for the reason again and again repeated before, that nothing can be new with God; no new thought, no new counsel or purpose.

And to consider, to what particularities the divine eye and purpose do reach; what we find recorded and comes under our notice by way of history, that therefore, must suppose there

hath been an eternal view, even of the same things, and a purpose concerning them. As for instance, that which appears to be the most barren part of the Bible, that large account that we have of genealogy in Scripture; How should Moses possibly come to know through the successions of so many hundreds of years, even two thousand years before him, what children such and such men had, all those that are reckoned up, and how many years they lived? And it was thought fit that should be put down: and how such families were ranked, and what nations sprang from them; all these must needs have been matter of divine Revelation, and therefore, were matter of divine knowledge, and therefore, were eternally so: all things being in the same order, under the divine eye, wherein they actually come to pass in the world.

So all the removes of men to and fro, here upon earth. "Thou tellest my wanderings," saith David; there is not a step taken this way or that, but all is under the divine direction and provision and purpose, that so and so it shall be.

And if you enlarge your thoughts further, to the concernments of formed nations and kingdoms, collective bodies, they must be understood also, to be within the compass of this object. The alterations in kingdoms; the seasons and intervals of rests and disturbances; of peace and of war, of plenty and of scarcity; of a prosperous and of an adverse posture of affairs, in respect of any, whatsoever, favourable providences or judgments that come upon these; these all lie under the counsel of the divine will. The revolutions of governments, when they are past, when they pass from form to form; God hath been pleased to give some more extraordinary proof and demonstration of his regency in these kingdoms, on purpose that it may be known (as Nebuchadnezzar, that great prince was forced to confess) that God rules over the kingdoms of men, and gives them to whom he pleaseth. Dan. 4. 32. The Most High rules in the kingdom of men. It is not said kingdoms, importing this whole world to be one kingdom to him, one great monarchy, all lying under his imperial power. And all this must be understood to be according to counsel, and according to purposes that were with him eternally. For (as hath been said before) his being is so; *Et eternum non patitur novum; no new thing can fall out in eternity.*

And so, for the state of his church in general, or of particular churches upon earth; all their concernments, as they are such, they fall under the counsel of the divine will which orders all their circumstances in reference to them; sometimes making their condition more prosperous and favourable, and

sometimes, more adverse, for trial and needful exercise of their graces, in these kinds wherein it is requisite such graces should have their exercises, which he hath adapted to such special purposes. So large (and for our thoughts, let them go as large, and far as they will or can) is the object about which the counsel of the divine will is conversant. But,

2. Something is to be said concerning the nature of such counsel and will, as it respects such an object; or this more special sort of object which I most intend in the present discourse. Why,

(1.) This is always to be held concerning the counsel of the divine will, that it is most perfectly wise; all things being in view to him at once, open to one eternal view in all their connections, references and dependancies; he having a thorough and everlasting perspection, even of all at once, of the things themselves and of their connection with one another, even as they are connected, not because they are so, so as to pass from one connected thing to another, as we in our more imperfect way of knowing things are constrained to do. And,

(2.) The counsel of his will must therefore, hereupon, be immutable: being most perfectly wise, there can be no imaginable reason of any change. He never needs alter his measures: "Known to him are all his works from the beginning of the world," was that grave saying of the apostle James, in that synod at Jerusalem. Acts 15. 18. Whatsoever he hath to do, or doth do, that he designed to do; for he acts nothing casually: and what he did design to do, he did consult about, so far as consulting can have place with him: we explained the sense of it before, that is, that he hath perfect perspection of all that is requisite and fit to be done, and so did purpose according thereto, and then doth according to that purpose. And therefore, to consider, besides the nature of such a divine purpose and counsel, its reference and significancy to human affairs. I say,

(3.) This same counsel of the divine will, it is a measure to himself of all his own agency, what he will do, and what he will not do; how far he will exert his influence, and wherein he will suspend it: how he will direct it this way and that, and how he will limit it. And,

(4.) By consequence, it must needs be a measure of all events; because nothing can eventually fall out, but according to his will, either effecting or permitting; and there being no determination of his will which is not still under the direction of divine counsel. And all this, we must understand to be constantly transacting with him, with the greatest clearness,

and with the greatest facility imaginable. You do observe among men, vastly different tempers and complexions of mind; some seem to be almost constantly calm and sedate, composed and serene, there appears nothing torpid or unequal in their frame or habit. Now, if we can conceive among human minds what is more perfect, and what is less, sure it should not be difficult to us to take our assent, and conceive concerning the Divine Mind, that it must be most absolutely perfect, never liable to any cloud, to any discomposure, all things lying in a most perfect clearness, and having their eternal formation or form there, with the greatest imaginable facility: and infinitely more than we can imagine. So as there is no cause for any thought concerning a *plenius negotii Deus*, as the epicurean objecteth, concerning such a Deity as should be engaged and taken up about making, and about governing such a world as this, that this must give too much business to such a Being, as we are not to conceive of otherwise than as perfectly happy, it not consisting (as they foolishly imagine) with the felicity and happiness of such a Being. But when we can conceive in some men, with how very great composure of mind they go through a great variety of business, their minds being always clear and serene, can we not consider concerning God, that his understanding is infinite, as reason and Scripture do most plainly speak; and so that nothing could ever be excluded it, or lie without it? as the various images of things are represented in a clear glass, detected there, without giving any toil or labour to the glass, or inferring upon it any change. And so the schools have been wont to speak of God's eternal knowledge of things, that he beholds them all as in an everlasting and eternal *speculum*, there being that perpetual and eternal clearness in the Divine Mind, that things lie there without any discomposure to him, without any disorder, in the same state and frame, wherein they do actually fall out; so as when they do actually fall out, whatsoever disturbance there is of one thing with another, and among the things themselves variously interfering, yet all these things are beheld without disturbance to him: as the various motions and agitations of many persons in a room, all represented in a clear glass, make no disturbance or discomposure in it at all, whatsoever there is in the things represented. Therefore, I pass,

3. To the reasons why we are to ascribe to God such a concern about human affairs, so as to employ the counsel of his will, even from eternity about them. I will shortly name to you these two plain and obvious things, as the reasons thereof, besides what Scripture doth, in many more places than those that I

have named, expressly assert about it: 1st. The most absolute perfection of his nature cannot but infer it: and 2d. the supremacy, the universality and accurateness of his government.

(1.) The perfection of his nature, that cannot but infer it. He being every way perfect, absolutely perfect, (which he must be, if he be God, we have no other notion of a Deity but of a being absolutely and universally perfect,) he must be omniscient, and must know all things; and if so, he must always have known them; for if ever he did not know them, there will be some addition to his knowledge when he comes to do so. But that knowledge to which there can be an addition is imperfect; and therefore, the divine knowledge could never admit of any addition, but all things, (as was said before) must have lain open everlastingly with him to one eternal view. And,

(2.) The supremacy, universality, and exactness of his government, doth necessarily infer it. Inasmuch as he is Lord over all, and is Most High, there can be none above him that should be director of such affairs. And inasmuch as he is universal Governor, if any affairs lie not under his government, they can lie under none. It is not a supposable thing, that one part of the creation should be governed, and another un-governed; part under a ruler and the other part under no rule at all. And then, the exactness of his government, not considered absolutely, but respectively, that is, with respect to the state of the governed creatures, the governed communities that lie under the management and dominion of his kingdom. We are to consider this world as in a state of apostasy; and we are not to expect that he should deal with this world, as if men were in a perfect state, for their frame and temper are far from perfect. He deals with them as suitable to the state of apostates, as those that have been, and are, in rebellion against him generally. And admirable it is that the methods of his government should be so mild and propitious; and that so much of common order should be preserved among them thereby, as we find there is, this being considered. But to such government, eternal provision and purpose are always necessary, and could not but be necessary. There must be eternal foresight of all that was to be done, and eternal purpose and counsel thereupon. We thence come,

4. To consider, that there can be nothing of ill consequence, justly and reasonably, drawn from hence. What is most supposable in this case, and of this kind, that is, which may present itself to a first view under the notion of an ill, or incor-

venient consequence, which chiefly lies under one of these two heads, 1st. That this hypothesis will preclude the use of human prudence; and 2d. that it will shut out prayer. These are two things that carry a first and more obvious appearance of an ill consequence, upon the supposition of what we have been hitherto asserting. But I shall labour to evince, that neither of these consequences can, with any reasonable colour, be thought to ensue. As,

(1.) That here, there should be no place nor use for human prudence. Thus some may too hastily think and pronounce, If there be a divine counsel and purpose about every thing that a man can do, or about every thing that shall occur to him, that he may either enjoy or suffer, to what purpose is it for men to consult and determine, or contrive this way or that? as not knowing but that they may, in the very thing they design and go about, run counter to the counsels of the divine will; and so all will be in vain, and to no purpose. We shall give you some considerations to shew the in-consequence, that it follows not, that there is no pretence that the use of human prudence should hereby be excluded. As,

[1.] That all things are determined by God to fall out in the way wherein they do fall out. I told you at first, when I entered upon this subject, we are not to conceive any such thing concerning him, as that he doth decree and determine things abstractly, without reference to the *media* by which they are to be brought about. We are to impute no such thing to God, with reference to the eternal states of men, as we spake then; that whatsoever a man doth he shall be damned, be he never so good, never so strict, never so pious; or that whatsoever such a man doth, he shall be saved, let him be never so wicked, never so irreligious or profane; never so strongly persist and persevere in such a course. We are to impute no such thing, no such counsel to the wise and holy God. Neither his word, nor the reason of the thing leads us to any such thought concerning him. And so, in reference to these lower affairs, we are never to think any such thing concerning him, as if he laid down purposes and decrees concerning this or that end, without connecting in his own eternal mind and view, the whole scheme of all the ways and methods and means by which such ends are to be compassed and brought about. And therefore,

[2.] Those things which, according to the counsel of his will, are to be brought about by the intervention and exercise of human prudence; these things are actually so brought about:

whatsoever is effected, whatsoever is done by the exercise of the prudence of a man, it lay in the divine mind and counsel, as a thing not only to be brought about, but to be brought about so, and in that way, by that very means, by the deliberation, and by the prudent contrivances of such and such of his creatures, that should serve his purpose in such a way. And therefore,

[3.] In this case, and in reference to all such events, the very objection is an argument. The objection, the possible use, or advantageous use, of human prudence is a proof and demonstration of it: for, according to divine counsel and purpose, such a thing as doth actually occur and come to pass by human prudence, was determined so to come to pass, by the intervention of human prudence. And again,

[4.] It is the much more common course, in the way of God's dispensation towards his creatures, to let things go on according to the posture and aptitude of the second causes by which they are effected and brought about; it is much the more common and usual course. He who is the supreme Ruler and Lord of all, is not to be supposed but he may at pleasure lay on a restrictive or regulating hand, as he sees meet to alter the natural course and tendency of things. But ordinarily he doth not so, but things do run on according to the aptitude and disposition and posture of the second causes, by the ministry whereof they are effected and brought about. And even as to voluntary and rational agents, whereas, the men of this world, (who are such agents,) are generally wicked, God generally, and for the most part, doth not hinder the ill purposes that they have formed and contrived and set themselves to execute. That, the Psalmist supposeth to be the common case when, in that psal. 37. 7. he gives so weighty counsel in reference to that case, not fretting, nor letting our hearts tumultuate and arise and swell within us, because of evil men that bring their wicked devices to pass, implying this to be the more ordinary case, that wicked men do bring their wicked devices to pass, God doth not lay that restraint, for great and holy ends and reasons, which will appear in their lustre and glory one day; but lets things run on in their own course according as the inclinations and aptitudes of other second causes do lead. And this being observably so, it is the most unreasonable thing in the world, to suppose that in rarer instances wherein the purposes of men are disappointed and frustrated by some signal hand from God, therefore the natural operations that do belong to men should be concluded to be generally or universally useless, or to be

precluded : or that the principles were useless which were suited to such operations or ends as those. But,

[5.] We are further to consider, that if God doth more extraordinarily interpose, so as to disappoint the evil purposes of men, contrived by their subtilty and craft, (which they are apt enough themselves to misname prudence,) he doth it in no such way as offers violence to the rational nature. He doth it by letting men befool themselves, or by letting them befool one another, or sometimes by letting the devil befool them. He sometimes lets one man befool another : as when that counsel of Hushai, proved to be the means by which God turned (as David prayed he would,) Ahitophel's counsel into foolishness. Sometimes, he lets the devil befool men, acting according to his own inclinations which he restrains not. He lets him loose as he did to deceive Ahab, being a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets, unto Ahab's destruction. He would not, himself, infuse a lie into the mind of Ahab, (which was a thing his nature was most abhorrent from, being the God of truth,) neither would he let a good angel go and tell a lie to him, as unbeseeming and, indeed, impossible to one that had the divine image in perfection in his nature. But there being a proneness in the wicked spirit (as the matter is parabolically and dramatically represented) to go and deceive Ahab, in his prophets, to his destruction, he lets him go. But there is no violence offered to the rational nature of man in all this. He acts by judgment, (such as it is) that is, by a mistaken judgment ; not by none, or against judgment, against a practical judgment, which indeed to the nature of man were impossible. And those that are under such deceptions as these, when they do indeed play the fool : as Ahitophel's counsel was turned into foolishness and they all became fools that followed it, yet they thought themselves wise in so doing : and so, those that were reckoned or did reckon themselves wise, were taken in their own craftiness, and their counsels driven headlong, as in Job 5. 13. the expression is. And what they do in such kinds, under such deception, they do freely and with complacency, pleasing themselves in their own way ; so as there is no violence offered to the nature of man, considering him as a rational, and as a voluntary agent in what he doth, even then, when his purposes are inverted and disappointed. But then,

[6.] If men do take up such purposes as it seems meet to the great and holy God to frustrate and disappoint, (which by extraordinary interposition, as hath been said, he doth very rarely : he is sparing in instances of that kind,) yet, that, men

are to blame themselves for; either, that they did propose to themselves unlawful designs; or, that they did pursue and prosecute lawful ones unlawfully; whence it hath seemed meet to that wisdom which governs the world, either to cross and defeat their designs, or to check and rebuke them, that they may reflect on and understand their own folly in so mishaping in their own course, as they are often wont to do when they take up wicked purposes, and form wicked designs which prove abortive. And how should it be otherwise, if they take counsel against the Lord and his anointed one, his Christ? Do you think it strange that that should be in vain? “Wherefore doth the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” Why is it a vain thing that they imagine and devise? It is counsel against the Lord and his Messiah. And if there be an inverteure of the counsel and purposes of men which do lie cross to the divine counsel and purpose, and that they clash with one another, what wonder is that? Nay, whose will is it fit should rule and oversway in such a case? Is God to quit the sovereignty and yield up his throne and sceptre, and say unto vain creatures, “Be it according to your mind, and according to your will,” when they will nothing but mischief, wrong to him, and ruin to all that are better than themselves? And sometimes, they pursue the most lawful things unlawfully: and then it is meet that God should some way or other give a check to them. As in such an instance as the apostle James mentioneth, (chap. 4. 13.) of such as say, in the power of their own self-conceit and self-will and self-confidence, “We will go to such and such a city, and will tarry there a year, and we will buy and sell and get gain:” and forget all this while that they live under the divine dominion and government; that they ought to say, “If the Lord will, we will do so and so.” It is very fit, that in such cases, God should put them in mind they have a Lord over them, and that he should give a check to such insolencies. And if they meet with rebukes because they will not carry themselves like those that live under the dominion and government of a Ruler who is superior to them, they will not walk in that light which before hath been made to shine in their minds and consciences, and God takes a severe method with them, to make them know themselves and him; there is nothing unfit done in the case. He doth but what he owes to himself to do, that he may do himself right, that he may not lose the honour and acknowledgment that are due to him, as he is Lord of all. But now, upon such a supposition as this, it is no more reasonable to say, that the understanding, or reason, or wisdom, or prudence which any man hath, is given him in vain, than it

would be to say, that because such and such a man is a very prudent, wise man, it is altogether in vain that he should have a prudent servant. And yet, there is no man so wise, but if he have occasion for a servant, he will have an understanding man to be his servant, and not a fool; a prudent one, and not one that is rash and foolish, and would do things precipitately and to disadvantage. But how unreasonable would it be to say, that because such a wise master will not let even this wise servant do his business his own way, but will check and control him and exercise the authority of a master over him, therefore, such a man hath a prudent servant in vain? Who would be so foolish as to say, the prudence of such a servant is to no purpose unless he may be master, and carry every thing his own way, according to his own mind and fancy? Or suppose a man had a watch that ordinarily goes well as he would have it, but sometimes he finds it to err, and then he rectifies it with his finger; would the owner of this watch, taking upon him to rectify it with his finger, say, "To what purpose are all the contrivances of this watch, and to what purpose are the several wheels and movements in it, if a man shall move it with his finger?" There is as little reason to pretend, that prudence and wisdom are given to any man in vain, because God will overrule him and shew himself to be supreme in sundry such instances as may occur. I say, there is as little reason to say and allege this, as there would be to say, that all the articles in a watch are in vain, because it may need sometimes to be rectified and corrected by a wise finger.

LECTURE VI.*

I shall only add to all that hath been said on this head, that the counsels of the divine will do very well admit of the use of human prudence, in subordination thereto, and it hath its great significancy in such subordination, but in opposition thereunto, it can signify nothing. And nobody is to think this strange, in subordination to the counsels of the divine will. Human prudence signifies much, all that it is covetable that it should signify. Many times God designs to bring about such and such events by the ministry of human prudence, and then the counsel of the divine will is so far from excluding it, that it doth necessarily include it, and take it in; cannot but do so. But most plain it is, that human prudence can signify nothing

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in opposition to the divine will. And would you have it? would any one wish it should? That human prudence should take place against the divine will, is that a thing to be wished? Or are we to be fond of human prudence in opposition to the divine counsel, as if we thought the world would be better governed by men than by God? That, sure, is never to be regretted, that there is no wisdom, no counsel, no understanding against the Lord. Sure, that should trouble none of us, but please all. And to think, hereupon, that human prudence must needs be a useless thing, because God doth not put all into the hands of men, and leave them to do in the world, whatsoever they please as so many ungoverned creatures, (as was formerly hinted,) it might as well be said, To what purpose is it for a man to have a prudent servant, unless the servant's will and pleasure may take place in every thing against his master's?

(2.) And I come in the second place to that other supposed inconsistency, to wit that the assertion of such a counsel of the divine will, must exclude the great duty of prayer. And I think it is very material and of great importance to discourse to you somewhat largely upon this head; because, I know how commonly it lies in the minds of many men, as an objection against that great duty; or else, they make use of the objection of that great duty, as an objection against the divine counsel and purpose, and the hand which they are to have in all their own affairs. Now, that this seeming difficulty may be cleared up, I will give you sundry considerations. As,

[1.] That the primary or more principal notion that we are to have of prayer, is to conceive of it as an act of worship, that is, as an homage due and claimed to be paid to the great sovereign Lord of all. That is the principal and prime notion that we are to have of prayer; that is, that it is such an act of duty as wherein we are to own and acknowledge God: it is due to him, as he is God, to be supplicated, sought to: that there be a dependance upon him, professed and avowed by his reasonable creatures. Now this being the first and primary notion of prayer, an acknowledging of God, and avowing our dependance upon him, and of his superiority over us, as that adjunct expression of it, bowing the knee before him, doth import, I would fain know whether he be the less adorable, for that he is infinitely wise? And if he be infinitely wise, then his wisdom and counsel must extend to all things. But doth his infinite wisdom render him a less adorable Object? Doth he less deserve to be worshipped, or have his due homage paid him by his creatures, for that he is infinitely wise? The counsel of his

own will extending to all things doth import so much ; he is wise without limit, so as that the exercise of his wisdom cannot be excluded or shut out in any case. If it could be excluded in any case, it were not infinite : but because it is infinite, is it therefore, a less excellency for being infinite ? And so, Doth he less deserve to be adored and honoured, and to have homage paid unto him as such ? And,

[2.] Whereas, when we do pray, we do also express inclinations and desires of our own, that we would have this or that brought about, when we foreknow the event to be determined by the divine will : prayer is so far from being excluded by that, that we pray with so much the more vigour and cheerfulness and alacrity ; and our hearts and souls are so much the more enlarged and engaged and drawn forth in prayer, even when we know the things we pray about are determined by the counsel of the divine will. As in that memorable case of Daniel's foreknowing by books, by Jeremiah's prophecies, that the approaching period and end of the seventy years, determined for the continued captivity of his people ; when he understood this book, and discerned the approach of the time, he sets himself with so much the more vigour to pray : (as you see Daniel 9. 1, 2.) finding out that the matter was near, and towards a period, he doth not therefore think prayer excluded, but sets himself to pray with so much the more earnestness and vigour hereupon. As, indeed, if any do consider the nature of man's constitution, and the frame of the human soul, it is evident that desire and hope do influence one another. It is a mighty damp to all rational desire to have no hope. And if the thing be looked upon as desirable in itself ; so much the more of hope, so much more of desire : and by how much the more hope doth rise towards confidence, desires grow so much the more fervent. As simple despair of any thing which we have an inclination to desire, damps desire ; when we see that the thing is altogether to be despaired of, reason itself dictates to us to withdraw our minds, and turn them another way. Daniel understood the time drew on, when this sad calamitous state of his people was to find its period and be determined ; then he sets himself with mighty vigour and fervour of spirit to prayer. And,

[3.] When we do not foreknow the event, as not having any discovery made to us what the counsels of the divine will concerning it are, yet, even then, the business of prayer is to refer ourselves, with reference to any such concerns, to the divine disposal. A thing most suitable to him and to us ; to him as he is the wise and sovereign Lord of all ; and to us, as we

are depending creatures, subject to his government, and are disposed of, in reference to all our concerns, or whatsoever we have any concern about, as he sees good. And therefore,

[1.] In reference to such things, wherein we are ignorant of the event and what God will do, the proper design of prayer is, to endeavour to obtain at his hands a disposition of spirit complying with his pleasure, so as there may be no contest between him and us; that whenever the event falls out, if it do prove agreeable to our inclinations, we may rejoice in it with so much the more raised and sincere gratitude: if it do not, that we may submit to him, without engaging in a contest with one who giveth no account of any of his matters; and with whom, none can contend and prosper. They must always have the worst of it, they must be worsted in it if they engage in a contest with him. Therefore, the business we must design in such prayer, or in prayer about such things, (the issue whereof we do not foreknow,) is not to bring the divine will to ours, but to bring our will to his. As the matter is aptly enough illustrated by some, suppose one comes down a rapid stream in a boat, and hath the opportunity to throw an anchor or hook on the shore, there he pulls, as though he would draw the shore to the boat, and yet, all that he can be rationally supposed to intend, is to draw the boat to the shore. So are we to design in prayer, that plucking ourselves unto God, the drawing of our souls to a compliance with him, that our wills may be brought to unite with his; not that we can imagine to change his will by any thing we can say, more than in the narrative of our prayer we do suppose to ourselves the informing him of any thing whereof we suppose him before ignorant. "He is of one mind, and who can turn him?" Job 23. 13. And therefore,

[5.] The availableness of prayer, considered in reference to the counsels of the divine will, is to be estimated by the tenour of our prayers: according as our prayer is modelled, so it will be available or unavailable. This is the confidence we ought to have in prayer, "that if we ask any thing according to his will he heareth us." 1 John 5. 14. And therefore, further,

[6.] We must make it our great business, in all our addresses to him in prayer, and especially in reference to temporal concerns, (about which we have no express signification of his will, as we have about spiritual and eternal ones) to have our prayers so formed as that they may agree with the court of heaven, (as I may speak,) whither they are to be addressed. As if any man on earth, is to petition a human judicature, he

must endeavour to know the stile and phrase of the court, and that his petition may be right in point of form; and especially so are we concerned to do in this case, when we are to address the great God. There must be a becomingness of God observed, that we address to him, as God is to be addressed to, and one that is absolutely supreme, and perfectly wise and good, who (according to that observable saying which I remember in the great Jew Philo, who gives us this notion of himself) hath given us that discovery, that we have always a ground of so fixed and formed an apprehension of him as one that can do all things, and will do that which is best. Such a conception of God, if our prayers do but carry with them a conformity to that conception, that is, that we have this fixed confidence concerning him, that he can do what he will, and that he will always do what is best, we can never think that such prayers can ever be unavailable. But this doth so highly agree with this apprehension that he doth all that he doth do, according to the counsel of his own will, that it not only is not prejudiced thereby, but we are greatly confirmed in it, that if he doth all things according to the counsel of his own will, he will never do any thing that is wrong, he will never do any thing that we ought to have so much as a wish, that it be otherwise than as he will do it: for as he can do whatsoever he will, so he will always do whatsoever is best. And,

[7.] Therefore, we ought to form our addresses and petitions to God, according as his word hath given us direction. As there are rules, some way or other, to be known in any prince's court, or in any court of judicature, how they are to be addressed to: some way or other, it is to be understood. And we may understand by his plain word, how he is to be addressed to. As to all those things that are of principal concernment and necessity to us, we find directions in his word to pray for such things, with promises they shall be granted upon serious and sincere prayer. We know his will so far about our principal concernments, as that they who repent shall be forgiven, they who ask his Spirit shall have it, to them that improve what they have, he will give more, that if we set ourselves to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, he will work in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure. About these, our greatest concernments, we are at a certainty. He hath told us in his most plain and express word, what he will always do in such cases. But we are always left uncertain about such things as are less considerable, and about things too, that are of a mutable goodness, that is, that are sometimes good and sometimes evil. The things of the mind are in

riably good, always good; what is the goodness of the mind is always so. That the mind be knowing, intelligent; that it be holy, pure, subject unto God; these are things always good, invariably good. But it cannot be said so concerning the *bona corporis*, the *good things of the body*, or the *bona fortunæ*, the *good things of fortune*, that they are always good, for their goodness is to be measured according to their suitableness and conformity or subserviency to some greater good. For we are to consider that as we have bodies so we have minds too; and that which would be good for my body, if hurtful to my mind, it loseth the nature of goodness; and therefore, is that goodness mutable, according as circumstances will render such and such things more and more subservient to a higher good, to a nobler kind of good that we are more to be concerned about. And therefore, for those things which are of a mutable goodness they cannot be the matter of an absolute promise, that shall be concluding and determinative concerning them universally, and at all times; because at some times that which would be a good, it may at another time degenerate into evil, by the variation of circumstances. But an evil cannot be the matter of a promise; it would be the matter of a threatening at such a time when it ceaseth to be good. If it should stand in the promise under the notion of a good, but by this and that circumstance loseth its aptitude and suitableness to the end wherein this goodness lies, then doth that good turn into an evil, and so cannot be the matter of a promise. You cannot say, you promise any one that which is evil, or which would be a hurt to him; therefore, the promises of God, in reference to things of this nature, are always suitable to the nature of the things. We have as express promises concerning temporal good things as the nature of the things will bear, or our circumstances admit, and therefore, God hath done more suitably to himself and us, in reference to such things, in telling us “all things shall work together for good to them that love God and that are the called according to his purpose.” Rom. 8. 28. Indeed, a person that is a sincere lover of God, cannot but be the better by whatsoever event occurs to him in external respects; for that love is an active principle in him, that co-operates to the making good of the promise. It thinks no evil, it makes a man construe well, all the divine dispensations, it forms his spirit to a compliance with the divine pleasure, and so, good will come out of it to such a one, to a so qualified subject, whatsoever the event be. And therefore, all the business of prayer that it may be significant and available, is to have it formed and modelled according to the tenour of the divine will as God hath expressed that

will to us in his word, and to pray for things agreeably to the discovery we have thereof: that is, with a peremptory confidence, in reference to those things that are expressly promised; and with submission, in reference to all other things: satisfying ourselves, with this, that he who is the most perfectly absolute, supreme God, nothing of evil can proceed from him, but as an ill affected subject turns things into evil to itself. And so the gospel becomes "the savour of death unto death," to an ill disposed mind; not from what it hath in itself, or as it proceeds from God, but only from the disaffected state and condition of the subject. And then again,

(8.) We are to consider this, that the interests of men in this world, in reference to their temporal concernments, do so generally interfere and cross with one another and oppose one another, that it is impossible all prayers should be granted. For there are many times prayers against prayers. One man or this sort of men prays for this event, and another sort, for the quite contrary event. Therefore, it is most absolutely necessary that the divine counsel should moderate, and have its agency, not only in bringing about events, but even in forming the spirits of men. When interests do so clash, and desires and prayers so contradict one another, (as they many times do,) with what confusion would it fill the world, if every irregular desire should be granted? And indeed, if the wills of men were to regulate the will of God, and their prayers were to prescribe, it would make fearful work in the world: if we had such a kind of *fatuum numen, a silly deity*, to be the object of our addresses and prayers, that were to use no counsel, no wisdom in judging what is fit to be done, and what is not, but every human desire should engage the divine power, and employ the divine hand, with what ruin and desolation would men's prayers fill the world! And so this world would be made a desolate wilderness, at that rate, if the prayers of men, without the interposition of the counsel of the divine will, were to prescribe finally what were to be done for them. And therefore, again,

(9.) It ought to be considered, that wherever there is any such thing as right prayer, there is a divine Agent to be employed, in reference to the whole business of prayer. As we have an Advocate and Intercessor without us at the right hand of God above, so, all that do belong to God have an Advocate and Intercessor within them. All the children of God, because they are such, because they are sons, God sends the Spirit of his Son into their hearts to teach them to cry, Abba Father; as Gal. 4. 6. compared with Rom. 8. 15. And it is therefore, called the Spirit of adoption, because it belongs to

the adopted ones, to those that are taken into that state and condition of sons; because they are sons, the Spirit is given. It is an intolerable injury, and absurdity, that among us who are called christians, with whom it is an article of our creed, that we believe in the Holy Ghost, we should so little consider what hand and part, he is to have in this matter. It is an idle vanity to think, that he is to dictate words to us, and that there ought not to be prayer, but what the Spirit ought to indite the very words of. No, that is not the business of his office; but to possess the soul with such a living, internal sense to which words will correspond; that soul that is filled with such a sense, will not want suitable words, (at least between God and itself) in which to utter that sense to him. And so is the work of the Holy Ghost, in this matter, expressed in that Rom. 8. 27. That when we know not what to pray for of ourselves, that Spirit makes intercession in us according to the will of God; (so we read it and do interpose in the translation more than is in the text,) it makes intercession according to God, (so it is in the original,) not barely according to his will, but in subserviency to his interest; and to his great one, which (it is true) his will must always respect too, as we cannot doubt. And therefore, if he is to be applied unto, and relied upon, that great Agent of God: and we are to refer it to him (as it were) to mind our petitions, that they may be right in form, this is the great business of that Spirit; he is thus far (as it were) the Master of requests, and we are to resign ourselves to him, to put our spirits under his formation, under the dominion of the Divine Spirit. "I do not know whether my mind may agree with the divine mind yea or no, but O! do thou make it agree, and conform it thereunto." And lastly,

(10.) We have, upon the whole, this to consider, that all prayers once so rectified and put into the right form and tenour, they do ever obtain their principal answer. According to the great platform and model of prayer that is given us, we pray with principal reference to the divine honour, if we pray aright, that the name of God may be hallowed; we pray that the governing power of his kingdom may obtain and take place all the world over: we pray that his will may be done on earth, as it is done in heaven. We have particular inclinations and desires of our own; these we are never to express but with this reserve, "Lord, if these desires of mine, agree with thy will; if they agree not with that, I renounce them, I disclaim them." So every good man is then answered, if he be denied: if he be denied in one respect, he is answered and his petition granted in higher and more principal respects; for the

principal thing he aims at is, that God may be glorified, "Hallowed be thy name;" and that in order and subserviency thereunto the governing power of his kingdom may take place, and that his will may be done. These are the great and principal petitions: and all things else are to be petitioned for but as they subserve these.

And therefore, now to sum up all. Prayer, it may be from two sorts of persons, either from a devoted or from an apostate creature. Prayer, proceeding from a devoted soul can never fail of its principal answer: for every such prayer is influenced by supreme love to God; his interests comprehend all our true interests: so that all doth but come to this, whether I love God more than myself, then that love will always dictate such prayers as can never miss of their answer. That is, if I pray as a devoted creature, and to be a devoted creature is to pray, is to love God more than myself. But, if I pray as an apostate creature, that is, as one that is gone off from God and keeps off from God and hath a separate interest from God, and will not come to him and return to him again; then my prayers always run after this tenour, "Lord I pray that my will may be done, that my interest may take place and be served, whatsoever becomes of all, or any concernments besides." But what! would we have the counsels of the divine will to give place to such insolent requests as these? that were, in effect, to pray, "Lord do thou descend and come down from thy throne. and resign it to me, and let me set up for myself; I would be a god to myself, and I desire to make no other use of divine power, (finding my own impotency in many things,) but only to serve my own purposes and ends."

Therefore, there is all imaginable encouragement to sincere prayer, from this doctrine, that God doth all things according to the counsel of his own will. And this, surely, we are greatly concerned to consider in such a juncture of time as we are now cast upon: nothing can be more opportune. We have a dubious prospect before us; we know not how things may issue. Now to pray with hearts possessed with the sense that God doth all things after the counsel of his own will, is the best preparation for prayer, in reference to the present concernments of this season, that can be thought. That is, it is such a disposition of spirit that will, in this duty of prayer, be both most honourable to God, and most comfortable to ourselves.

Most honourable to God; nothing could reflect on him more than to pray with a contrary notion concerning him; that is, that he doth not do things after the counsel of his own will, but as

poor foolish creatures here in this world, shall prescribe and dictate to him: they make him do any thing, draw him to this or that by the importunity of their requests and desires. You cannot give a notion of God more injurious to him, or more repugnant to his very nature. For then we must suppose him a Being of mere power, absolute, almighty power, which any fool may command when he pleaseth. Whata strange sort of Deity do we worship! particularly if we pray with such a notion of God as this. But nothing can be more comfortable to ourselves, than to supplicate him, according to this true notion of him, that he doth all things after the counsel of his own will. With what quiet minds may we pray; and acquiesce in all the issues of things! Things lie in the best hands they can lie. We have this to satisfy our hearts in: and though we pray as men, we are to expect he should answer as God. We can pray but with the wisdom and foresight of poor fallible creatures: but then we are to expect him to answer according to the wisdom of an all-comprehending Deity. And as this is most highly honourable to him; so it will be most highly satisfying and comfortable to ourselves, and upon the best terms from which a reasonable mind can receive any satisfaction.

LECTURE VII.*

It only remains to make some *Use* of all that hath hitherto been spoken. And so comprehensive a truth as this, you will apprehend to be of very large and copious usefulness. I shall contract as much as the matter admits. It serves,

1. To shew us, how we are to form our notion of God. And if any have a mistaken one, how they may rectify and reform it. It lets us see we are to conceive of God to be a Being of infinite wisdom, for according to our notion of counsel, it is the immediate product of wisdom. Only, when we apply it to God we must do it so as to sever all that it imports of imperfection, and to include all that it imports of highest perfection. We find it needful with us, to consult and advise with our friends sometimes; however, with ourselves, and our more deliberate thoughts; but no such thing can be said of God, with whom all things lie open, in one infinite, eternal and all-comprehending view at once. That is not the meaning of counsel with him, as it is with us, as though being uncertain and doubtful, we did need to be counselled and advised: but

* Preached May 27, 1692.

that of perfection, which we mean by counsel and most perfect judgment of things, that we are to ascribe to him : and so, as that is the result of wisdom, it is with him in the highest perfection without consideration, so, that we can have no notion of wisdom, that doth not imply counsel ; nor of divine counsel, that doth not imply the most perfect, most exact, and most accurate wisdom. We see he doth all things according to the counsel of his will, so as never to err in any thing ; never to make one wrong step. For how often is he celebrated by expressions, that do import so much, God who is wise. What glorious ascriptions are there to him as such. “ To God only wise, be honour and glory.” Rom. 16. 27. And so that of 1 Tim. 1. 17. You have the same kind of doxology even in the same terms. And so in the epistle of Jude, the concluding words of that epistle : “ To God only wise, be honour, and glory, and dominion, for ever and ever.” This appropriate term, *only*, only wise, speaks that there is no wisdom, that is not from him, nor in him, that he is primary wisdom, the original seat of wisdom. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all liberally. He can do so, he hath it in all its fulness, in its most absolute plenitude in himself. James 1. 5. And therefore, is he said to be the Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, every congenerous gift ; we must understand it agreeable to so exuberant a Fountain : and hereby, we are to rectify our thoughts of God, if we have taken up wrong ones ; for we must conceive of the several attributes of the Divine Being, agreeably to this, as they are complicated with this most perfect wisdom, as that is most especially conjunct therewith. If any should think of God’s power, as only an act of boisterous omnipotency, working at random, not guided by wisdom and counsel : if they should conceive of his will, as if it were a stiff, inflexible resolvedness of doing things without judgment or wisdom, if they should conceive of his wrath, as an all-consuming flame, burning up all before it, without distinction, without discrimination : if any should think of his love as a fond inclination to this or that person, or thing, without being directed by wisdom or counsel : all this is infinitely to wrong God ; it is indeed to create to ourselves a God like ourselves. But this is infinitely injurious to represent him by ourselves, as a being of mere power, and of mere will, without considering, that he is a Being of infinite wisdom, and so doth all things according to the counsel of his own will. And again,

2. We are further to learn, how we are to conceive of God’s works ; for every thing works as it is : and as he is a Being of

wisdom, we are to reckon, that there must be characters of wisdom and counsel upon all that he doth. There is eminently so, upon the works of his creation. He hath established the world by his wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by his discretion. Jer. 10. 12. Wisdom is the parent of order, where-soever there is any thing of order, that surely must be attributed to wisdom as the directive cause of it ; it must be found, if not in second causes, yet in the First. The stable ordinances of day and night, the certain returns of summer and winter, the regular motions of sun, moon, and stars, and the like : in all these we are to behold the wisdom of God, who hath settled things by so accurate counsel, according whereunto he doth all that he doth. And so we are to conceive concerning the works of his providence too, that there are counsel and wisdom, which conduct them all, which regulate human affairs wherein men have themselves but a subordinate agency, under the supreme and sovereign Ruler of all. We are to reckon nothing falls out casually, nothing undetermined, either to be wrought or effected by him, or at least to be permitted, for greater and more preponderating reasons, against the restraints that might have been laid upon the second causes, by which they are wrought. And again,

3. We are further to learn hence, the extensiveness and universality of God's powerful and governing influence. He worketh all things, he hath an agency about all that is done. It is true, the words are capable of being thus understood, He worketh whatsoever he worketh according to the counsel of his own will. But there cannot a hand be lift up, nor a foot stir, not a power or faculty of any creature be exerted, but he hath a working agency one way or other in reference thereto : not so much as a sparrow falls to the ground, but it is within the compass of that agency of his, which doth all things after the counsel of his own will. Not so much as a hair drops from any head without him : all things, as they refer to him, are done with number, weight and measure : and so, wisdom and counsel, have a universal exercise, in reference to all things that are done under the sun, even the meaner concerns of men in this world. If you go to the business of agriculture or husbandry in the general ; the several methods of husbandmen in ploughing, sowing, threshing and the like, are all said to be from the Lord, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working. Isaiah 28. 29. And therefore, we are hereupon to acknowledge, and own with adoration, the universal extensiveness of his governing influence ; as was formerly noted in the opening of the words, in working all things ; that is the ex-

pression, an energy that is most intrinsic, intimate, inward to every inferior agent, still exerting and putting forth itself, in whatsoever is wrought or done under the sun. And he is even more intimate to us, (as paganish light itself, doth more anciently observe) than we are to ourselves. That phrase is fetched from more refined paganism, into the schools of christians, that he is more inward to us, than we are to ourselves, so as that there is a divine energy working and stirring in every created agent whatsoever. And,

4. We may next learn hence, the reasonableness and congruity of all his public constitutions and laws, which he hath made for the government of his reasonable creatures. Legislation is a great act of sovereignty, indeed the prime and most principal. If God do all things according to the counsel of his own will, it is according to the counsel of his will that he hath made laws for those who are capable of government by law, as only the reasonable creature is. Laws are frequently spoken of under the name of counsels. Your human laws are commonly called *consulta*, as among the Romans, those that went under the name of *senatus consulta*; such things as were advised upon, and, as it were, weighed in balances. Are they fit, or are they not? Will this be a useful constitution, yea or no? And so is the frame of divine laws spoken of, under the name of the counsel of God. The pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves. Luke 7. 30. It is spoken in opposition to Christ and his teachings. Those that were doctors of the law among the Jews, they rejected the counsel of God against themselves. Indeed, the whole revelation of God's mind, about the salvation of men, it bears that name, which included the perceptive as a very noble part of it. I have not shunned, saith the apostle, to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. Acts 20. 27. In all this, therefore, we ought to acknowledge and adore a divine wisdom, and especially in that, which is the standing constitution, for the governing of men, in reference to their salvation and final blessedness, since the apostasy, and you find God most highly celebrated and magnified, upon that account, in that Rom. 16. latter end: the apostle there speaking of the gospel constitution, under the name of a mystery, concludes all thus, "Now to him that is of power to establish you, according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ," (ver. 25.) according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations, for the obedience of

faith, "To God only wise, be glory, through Jesus Christ, for ever." His wisdom is conspicuous in this established constitution of his, which is to last through all the ages of time, and which is the constitution of that kingdom, which is never to be shaken. That is called the kingdom not to be taken down: Heb. 12. latter end. The compages whereof are so firm and strong, as to suit a designed perpetuity. Whereupon, they that live under the gospel, are warned concerning their deportment under it. Now that we have received a "kingdom, that cannot be shaken, let us have grace to serve God acceptably. with reverence and godly fear." He will not now be dallied with by men, whom he hath put under the dispensations of the gospel; as that epistle to the Hebrews begins. There were some temporary constitutions wherein God did deal with men, and speak to them in various and variable methods. But now, he hath spoken to us by his Son: and this is such a state of things as shall last as long as the world lasts, and those that do not comport with this method, or law of grace, in order to being saved, shall never be saved! Therefore, let us seek grace to serve him acceptably. The last efforts of divine wisdom are seen in this constitution.

5. It thereupon, therefore, further lets us see, the impudence of sinners, who confront their own imaginations, and their own lusts, to the wisdom and counsel of the divine constitutions; for that is indeed the case, and the very state of the controversy between God and a guilty creature that hath been in an apostasy from him, and doth yet refuse to return. This is the very sum of the controversy between God and them, Who is wiser, who is best capable of prescribing and giving laws? for wisdom is the most conspicuous thing, (as was said) in legislation. Authority is supposed, it is true, but if there be never so unquestionable authority, if there be not wisdom to use it, it would be strange work that one destitute of wisdom would make of governing authority: strange laws, strange edicts there would be, where there was uncontrollable power without wisdom. But (as was told you) when laws are to be made, here is the great exercise of governing wisdom, such as doth befit the state of a ruler, to consider how the exigency of the case may be answered, what laws will be more suitable for such and such, or for a people in such circumstances. Now, when the counsels of heaven are opened, (as it were) into a result, in such a constitution; here is the law of that kingdom that is erected and set up for them that are to be saved. And here comes an insolent creature and contends against the Lawgiver, and disputes the matter with him that gave him breath; what impudency is here! That law of grace,

it saith, wheresoever it is promulgated, to them that come under this government of grace, or will be the disciples of grace, grace doth teach them that live under it, "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, godly and righteously in the world." But here, is an impure, obstinate sinner, to whom notices are given of the good and acceptable will of God to this purpose, that the gospel that is preached to him, the law of the Redeemer's kingdom, it saith at the very first, Repent, now that kingdom is come among you, repent, turn. The divine wisdom saith to the sinner, "Turn, turn or die, turn or thou art lost." But he saith, It is wiser to go on, to persist in my own course; it is a wiser thing to live a stranger from God still, and as without God in the world. Divine wisdom saith to men, "God hath a mind and design to save you, deny you all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and subject yourselves to God," "No, it is wiser (saith the sinner,) to live an ungodly life still, it is a wiser thing to lay the reins on my own lusts, and do whatsoever is good in mine own eyes, it is wiser to please my own flesh than the God that made me; it is wiser to indulge sensual inclination and follow the imagination of my own heart." For men, I say, to confront their own imaginations and lusts to the divine counsel, it speaks the height of impudency in sinners, that they do not turn, that they will not be brought back to God. And,

6. It further lets us see how sad and forlorn the case of unreconciled and impenitent sinners is. God hath done all things according to the counsel of his own will, therefore, the constitution that he hath made and settled, is uncapable of change. There is an immutability stamped upon the divine counsel, and what is likely, then, to become of such men as run counter to all the wisdom and counsel, that is conspicuous in the divine constitutions? Because of their perfection they cannot be changed, and because of the sinner's wickedness, he will not. God cannot change, and men will not. What is then like to become of things between him and them? But,

7. We may further learn hence, how hopeful and comfortable their state is, whose minds and hearts are brought to a liking of the methods of God, for the saving of sinners, to a compliance and agreement with them. O! happy man! The unerring, and therefore unalterable counsels of heaven, have determined well concerning thee, and concerning thy state. You see in this same chapter where the text lies, that the gospel constitution carries, (as it were) this inscription upon it, "To the praise of the glory of his grace." Look upon the whole frame of divine constitutions, that refer to the saving of sin-

ners, and you may see (as it were) in golden letters written upon this noble fabric, “To the praise of the glory of his grace.” Thus the gospel constitutions stand, (as it were) dedicated, “To the praise and glory of divine grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” And observe then, what follows in the next verse, “In whom we have redemption, through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence.” This is the mystery of God; he hath made known to us the mystery of his will; it is a most mysterious thing that ever he should have such a will towards me. But he doth all things according to the counsel of his own will; and thereupon, there is an immutability and unchangeableness upon the determination of it, as you see in that Heb. 6. 17. Wherein, God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise, the immutability of his counsel; He hath confirmed it by his oath, added to his word, that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, the heirs of promise might receive that strong, that steady, that unshaken consolation. It is to be attributed to want and deficiency of wisdom and foresight, that the constitutions and determinations of men, need so often to be altered. Such and such an inconvenience was not foreseen; such a law was made, and it may be, a little trial and experience, shew it to be very inconvenient, and so, it is fain to be reversed, repealed, or needs some explanatory additions, or the like; it is reckoned a piece of meanness, and disparagement, to be put to alter edicts; and because the Medes and Persians were a proud and haughty nation, therefore, were their laws and statutes irreversible, never to be changed; so that they did assume to themselves infallibility, and beyond what could agree to the condition and capacity of creatures, of men, in an imperfect state. But the divine counsel being all upon foresight, all the determinations thereof, being made and settled upon one comprehensive view, here is no place for the supposition of a change. And therefore, is this most highly consolatory to all that feel their hearts comply with the gospel terms, with the evangelical constitutions: “I find my heart is wrought to a closure with that, and I am never to fear a change.” It is the effect of his counsel, his immutable counsel which he hath shewn, that such as we might have strong consolation who fall in with, and comply with his terms.

8. It further serves to let us see the vanity of their confidence, who have any separate interest, and drive any opposite design from, and to, this of the great God himself. His coun-

sels must stand, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations; whereas, the counsels of the froward are turned headlong: as the expression is, Job. 5. 13. How unequal is the contest, when there comes to be a competition between the design of a mortal man, though never so insolent, and that of the immortal God? Some of themselves have thought it insolent for creatures so to assume. Rabshakeh thought it were an imaginary thing, and very wrongly charged upon Hezekiah, yet seems to look upon it as a great piece of pride, "Thou sayest, I have counsel and strength for war," thinking it to be an unbecoming thing: yet, though he only speaks of the counsel and might of Hezekiah as opposed to his own, or that of his master Sennacherib; but he never thought how insolent it was to oppose that, his counsel to that of heaven. "I have counsel and strength for war," but how soon are all those counsels and strength blown upon, blasted and brought to nothing when God hath any work of his to do, whereunto, that counsel and might are opposed. And to conclude, I add,

9. That since God doth all things according to the counsel of his own will, the times and seasons for doing any great work that he intends, are always chosen by him, with most accurate wisdom. They are most fitly chosen; therefore, whereas, we are apt to blame the divine methods because he doth not take our time and our way, how unreasonable is it, since it is plain, that all the things he hath to do are affixed to particular seasons, which lie under divine determinations? "Unto every thing there is a season and a time, to every purpose under the sun. Eccles. 3. 1. And if you will look a little further in that book, you will see there, that as there is a time for every purpose, every event, so there is also judgment for every time, there is judgment, which is the effect of counsel, or that whereunto counsel results. For every thing there is a time and judgment. And so thereupon, there comes to be a critical nick of time into which such and such things must fall, and into no other. And therefore, it is said, that "the misery of man is great upon the earth." Eccles. 8. 6. Because there is time and judgment to every purpose, therefore, that is, because time and judgment are not considered, are not understood by men, therefore, their misery is great. And so they are taken, many times, in an evil time, without foresight; they do not know the time; not because they are ignorant of the time, but because they are unready, unprepared, for what is to be done and suffered in such or such a juncture of time. And so you see their case is represented still, upon that account, miserable. But the wise, they do consider time and judgment:

Happy men ! therefore, happy men ! as those two verses fall in together : Eccles. 8. 5, 6. This ought to be considered, and it makes a man a happy man that considers it. Therefore, how quiet and calm may all men's minds be ; and the minds of the wise will be that do equally consider things. We find things were determined most punctually, relating to the great concerns of that people, God had in the world heretofore, when they were yet an unconformed people. Four hundred and thirty years must pass, just so many from the time of his capitulating with their head, Abraham, striking a covenant with him. And so much time there must be, because the sins of the Amorites were not yet full, and Canaan could not be ready for the reception of them, and there did four hundred and thirty years pass upon this account. When they were in captivity in Babylon, seventy years was determined for that. When the woman is in the wilderness, there is a set time ; forty and two months, or twelve hundred and sixty days. And we are not to think that the determinations of divine wisdom and counsel are less certain because they are less known to us, and we only see by the event what was determined. Twenty years have elapsed since the haughty French tyrant hath been the terror and scourge of Europe, and especially of reformed Christendom ; for it is so long, (in the year 1672) that he first attempted on our neighbours and brethren of Holland. Many might have been apt to think, why hath not God animadverted on him sooner, put upon him an earlier rebuke ? Why was it not the last year ? Why was not his fleet scattered, and his army broken then, as they have been, in several parts, this year ? Or why was it not the year before that ? Why, it is a foolish thing for us to contend and dispute with the counsel of heaven, and we are to refer it to the determination of divine counsel, to choose the fittest time to begin to animadvert on so insolent an enemy, and the aptest means how first to let him know that he is a mortal, and that they in whom he trusts, have a mortality upon them ; that they are liable to defeatments, to disappointments ; that their strength is not brass or iron, or such as cannot be broken when he will. He can make so weak and mutable a thing as the wind to serve his purpose against so haughty a one. We are to consider that these things fall out according to the counsel of the divine will : he is not to give us a reason why no such thing was, so many years ago, why he did not raise up such and such, who might have abated his pride, and brought a blast upon him long before now.

Hitherto, we have by way of use, from the doctrine of this text, let you see so many *inferences*, and recommended so

many *truths* from it, which, according to the aptitude that it hath in it, may help to rectify and regulate our thoughts, apprehensions, and notions in many things.

LECTURE VIII*.

The further use which remains, is to direct *our practice*; for in many respects, it hath in it a great aptitude, and suitability too. In order to this, it is requisite,

1. That we take up the several sorts of the considerations which may be had of the counsels of the divine will. And then,

2. That we reflect upon our own distemper, and the faultiness of our spirits and practice, in reference hereunto. And accommodately, then, to consider both of the counsels of the divine will, and of our own miscarriages, and so recommend to you sundry heads of instruction, in reference to our future practice. We are,

1. Variously to consider the counsels of the divine will. They may be either considered indefinitely; or else, they may be considered with some distinction, according to the various references they may bear towards us, and our concerns and affairs, whether they may be eternal or temporal; and these, whether they be private or public.

And again, whether they be known to us, or unknown; so variously may the counsels of the divine will be considered. And then, for his precepts, which are the result too, of the counsel of his will. They expressly declare what it is the counsel of his will we should do, though therein also, we are to expect his co-operation; he working and in-working also therein, according to the counsel of his will. And many times, the counsels of his will are known to us only by the event. We never know what God would do in this or that instance, till the event shews us. And so in such and such things, because the event hath not shewn the counsels of the divine will in many things, they are yet altogether unknown to us.

2. Now, according to these various considerations of the counsels of the divine will, we shall find ourselves, many ways, to be faulty in reference thereunto.

As in reference to the counsels of God indefinitely considered, that either we ourselves do not firmly enough believe the great doctrine of this text, that he really doth all things

* Preached June 3, 1692.

according to the counsel of his own will; or that we deeply enough consider it not, and carry not an habitual sense in our souls correspondent thereunto: that we have not high and great thoughts as we ought hereupon: that we are so prone to dispute matters with him: that there is no more of dutiful compliance with the counsels of his will, even then, when they are known: that many are so apt to cherish in themselves a perpetual dread about their eternal concernments, which lie most certainly under the disposition of his own eternal will: that they are so distrustful of so wise and mighty an Agent, that doth all things according to the counsel of his own will: that there is no more of quietude, tranquillity and rest of spirit in him, so considered, as one that doth what he pleaseth, and always according to wise counsel.

Now, according to these various considerations, which we ought to have, both of God and ourselves, of his counsels, and of our own miscarriages and distempers, are these *instructions* to be, which I am now to recommend to you. And,

(1.) I pray, Let us charge this upon ourselves, more thoroughly to establish the belief of this truth in our own souls, that God, in very deed, doth work all things after the counsel of his own will. Let not our minds waver and hover, in reference hereunto, as if this were a doubtful matter, as if possibly, it might be otherwise, as if either he were ignorant or oscitant, and unconcerned about the affairs of his creature, as if any thing might possibly fall out without his advertency. For we should consider with ourselves, being once at a certainty about the existence of God, about which if we be not at a certainty, we can be certain of nothing; if (I say) we be at a certainty concerning this, and we may be as sure of it as that we are, and that this world is, and that there is any such thing as wisdom and power and goodness, any where to be observed and taken notice of in the world; we and this world, and whatsoever there is of excellency and perfection in it, must all have some original; they are not nothing, and therefore could not come out of nothing. If we be (I say again) at a certainty about this, that is, in short, that there is a God, we may be at equal certainty about this, that he worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. For I beseech you, reflect and consider how well would it agree with your own minds, and with the natural notions and conceptions that are placed and fixed there, to conceive of an ignorant God, or of an impotent God, or of an oscitant, neglectful God. Do but consider, how well any such conception or apprehension can agree with the natural notions you have in your minds already, and may take notice of, if

you reflect. And thereupon, let disputes be at an end with you, and fix and establish the belief of it in your own souls, that in very deed he worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. And,

(2.) That hereupon (this being once thoroughly believed) it may be more deeply considered: and that we would labour to carry an habitual sense of it about us, from day to day, through this world. For to any one that considers, these things are very distinguishable; dead notions, and living sense, even in reference to the same truth. I have such a truth in my mind, but how have I it? If I have it as a dead notion, then it is all one to me as if I had it not. Let it not, therefore, satisfy us to have so mighty, important a truth as this lie in our minds as a dead notion; but let us labour to have it there as living sense, that we may resort to upon all occasions, and draw forth into present use as the matter shall, from time to time, require. And,

(3.) Labour to live adoring lives towards the glorious God, so considered, as one that worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. How should we, hereupon, be composed of adoration towards the blessed God, so as that wherever any actual present instance occurs and appears to us, wherein that agency of his shews itself, we be always in a disposition to bow our heads and worship! Here is a manifest effort of Deity, as the power and wisdom of God, that doth all things after the counsel of his own will. We should especially labour to maintain an adoring frame and disposition of spirit, with reference to these two great excellencies of the Divine Being which appear and shine forth in view, in this truth held forth to us in this text: "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:" that is, almighty power and infinite wisdom. Two things, than which nothing can be supposed to make an object more adorable, to make any thing a fitter object of adoration. Almightyness—he worketh all things. Is not he almighty that can do all things? and infinite wisdom—for he doth all things after the counsel of his own will. So, that wheresoever there is an exertion of his power, there is an exertion of his wisdom too, guiding that efficacious exertion of his will, that he doth not act in any thing by a boisterous and extravagant exertion of power, without judgment or without wisdom or without counsel, that all things that are done, are done by him: one way or other he hath an agency in every thing; and that nothing is done by him but by the direction of that wisdom that can mistake in nothing: all things consulted, and done after the counsels of his own will. A man of great might and of great celebrated wisdom too, how venerable a person is he in the account

of all? But to have these two things in conjunction, to wit, almighty power, with infinite, unlimited wisdom, sets a very adorable Object before our eyes. And it is a reproach to us, if we, thereupon, do not carry an adoring frame of spirit, every day, about this world with us.

(4.) Another instruction, hereupon, will be, that we never contend against him. What! Against him that worketh all things after the counsel of his own will? Is he a fit Object for our contention? Will we undertake to dispute matters with him? Think with yourselves, both how foolish and how wicked that must be. He that can do all things, whatsoever he will, it must be a very foolish thing to contend with him. What shall we get by it? He that contends with God, can he hope to be a gainer? He that strives with his Maker, woe to him: all that we can gain by it is but to infer a woe upon ourselves. Isaiah 45. 9. Therefore, it is a very foolish thing to enter into a contest which we are to despair beforehand of ever getting any thing by. And then, How wicked a thing is it! For certainly, the sovereignty must belong to him who worketh all things, and that after the counsel of his own will. It must, upon all accounts, belong to him. He will certainly carry the matter, and have the sovereignty. He worketh all things: almighty and resistless power is lodged in him; and he ought to have the sovereignty. For to whom should it so fitly appertain, as to him that doth all things according to counsel, never any thing rashly, nothing unfit in itself, nothing unseasonable, whensoever it is done? Therefore, (as the expression is there) he that contends with God, let him answer it; let him try if he can; for to be sure he never can, he never will be able to answer it, to enter into a contest with God, who is One that so wisely, and according to so stable, and so steady counsel and judgment doth all things. Again,

(5.) Labour dutifully to comport with him as he is such a One that “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,” and according to such considerations, (as hath been hinted to you,) as we may severally have of these counsels of the will of God. There are counsels of his will that are made known and signified by his express precepts. As was told you, the last time, legislation, making of laws, is one of the prime acts of wisdom, wherein above all things that excellency is to be conspicuous and shew forth itself. Now we shall dutifully comport with the counsels of his will, made known by his precepts and laws, when we do obey them. That when once we find that charge laid upon us to do so and so, by express divine precept, we immediately labour to get our spirits formed to an

obedient compliance, saying within ourselves, "I have nothing to do, in reference to such and such a thing, but to obey." "Mortify such a lust," saith the command, "Lord I yield and will endeavour to obey." "Love me with all the heart and soul and mind and strength:" "Lord, I will to my uttermost." It is a law founded in counsel; there could never have been a wiser law, nor a more merciful one, from a good God, towards an indigent, depending creature, than that I should place my love, my desire, my delight on himself. If, considering me as a wandering creature, I find his word saith to me, "Repent;" a wise counsel is spoken to me according to the counsel of his will. I will persist in sin no longer; I will turn that I may live. If he have made known his counsels concerning such and such things that he will do, that he will put an end to this world, that the wickedness of the wicked shall come to an end; that his Son shall appear in the end of time, and shall be the final Judge; it is then dutiful to comply with such counsels of the divine will, to be always in an expecting posture: to say, "O let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, according as thou hast determined; we approve of the counsel of the divine will, and will patiently wait till it come. And as for that appearance and coming of our Lord, we will wait and long for it; looking for it as the reviving, heart gladdening hope of our souls." Whereinsoever the divine will is made known to us, or which way soever the counsels of it are known, let them be dutifully comported with. Such things as are only known to us by the event, let us dutifully own and acknowledge them. I know it was the divine will, according to counsel, that such and such things should be either effected by himself, or permitted to be effected by those in whom he saw such a disposition, or from whom he did not withhold power to effect it. Again,

(6.) Take heed of slavish dread, in reference to your own eternal concerns. Most certain it is, that there are counsels of the divine will conversant about the eternal concerns of every one of us; but take we heed of slavish dread in reference hereto. There is no cause for it. It is an un-gospel-like spirit to live in a slavish dread, even about our eternal concerns, under a gospel of grace which deals with us principally about them, and whose special, particular, and great design is to advise and direct us, even touching them.

But it may be here said, How is it possible for one in an uncertainty, not to be in a dread about his everlasting concerns, about those concerns of his, which however they lie, will never alter, will always be the same? One that finds

himself to have been, hitherto, under the power of some reigning lust or other, have not I reason to be in a continual dread, what shall become of me for ever?

That was a thing we find represented as not suitable to the state of a very Cain. Suppose thy state to be as bad, suppose thyself a very Cain for wickedness, you see how God bespeaks him, when there was some present token that he was not so acceptable as Abel was. Cain might perceive it, hereupon his countenance falls, and God reasons the matter with him, "Why is thy countenance fallen? If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted? If thou persist still to do evil, it is true, sin, that is, vengeance, the consequent of sin, lies at the door. But if thou dost well, shalt not thou be accepted?" So he bespeaks even a Cain; so you must understand him to bespeak you. In the worst that you can suppose of your case, this is the counsel of the divine will, even concerning thee. Hereupon, then, God ought to be the Object of thy reverence; not the Object of thy dread. Thou oughtest to reverence him, not to dread him, as one that doth all things after the counsel of his own will. But you will say again, "Where lies the difference?"

The difference is great, and most manifest, between reverence and dread. Reverence carries love in it: dread carries hatred. And am I now to dispute the matter with you, whether any man ought to hate God? Ought you to hate him, think you? Ought he to be the Object of your hate? No, place all your reverence upon him, which certainly carries love in it. For reverence hath goodness for its object; the most excellent good is the object of my reverence. By how much the more there is of goodness in any one, by so much the more is he the object of my reverence. But it is evil, destructive, pernicious evil, that is the object of my hate, and consequently of my dread. But you are no more to think that God can be the Object of a man's dread, than you can think that a fit notion, or a self-consistent notion, an evil God. Can there be any such thing as an evil God? There can be no such thing as the affection of dread (involving essentially hatred in it) duly placed upon God, unless you would suppose an evil God, which is a contradiction even in the very notion. Therefore, turn all your hate (let the case be the worst that can be supposed) upon yourself, and all your love upon God. Think of him with reverence that carries love in it. And think of yourselves with that dread (as you are yet wicked creatures) which carries hate in it. And this is a true gospel frame, to hate one's self, loathe one's self, fall out with one's self, judge one's self, condemn one's self; but all the

while to reverence God: let him be ever amiable in your eyes.

Aye, but you will say, "How can this be but matter of dread to me, when I find myself a wicked creature, and whom, therefore, the wrath of God must pursue? for his wrath is revealed from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men: and I find myself such a one, a wicked creature, an ungodly, an unrighteous creature."

Do but consider here, the objection carries its own answer in it. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven." Against what? Against ungodliness, against unrighteousness: and you are such a one. But what, is it necessary always to continue such? The wrath of God can never be directed against any creature but as he is wicked. But then his word saith, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isaiah 55. 7.

But you may perhaps say, "I am a wicked creature, and this is the thing I dread, that I shall be always so, I cannot alter the state of my own case, I cannot mend myself; this is that therefore, which makes me stand in dread."

Why, to that I shall shortly say, either you desire to be other than you are, or you do not; either you desire, of a wicked creature, to be made holy, godly and righteous, or you do not desire this. If you do desire it, and you say, this is the object of your dread, that you shall never be other than a wicked creature, because you cannot mend yourself; why dread, (as I told you,) carries hatred in the nature of it, and hatred of wickedness. If you dread this continuance in wickedness, you hate it. But I would fain know, if it be possible to desire and hate the same thing. Do you desire and choose to be always wicked, and yet hate and dread to be so? These are inconsistent: what you say now, overthrows itself. It is impossible for you to desire to be always what you are, if you really dread, that is, hate that state of wickedness wherein you are. If that be the matter of your dread, (as it ought to be) then you do hate to be what you are, and you desire to be what you are not. Then pursue this apprehension further, a little, "I am a wicked creature, and I desire to be otherwise than I am, I dread myself, I hate myself as I am such: then I do desire to be such as God would have me to be, that is, a holy creature, and one conformed to his holy nature and will;" and if this be the posture of your soul in reference to yourself, and your own state Godward, you very well know what he hath

declared of his readiness to accept such. When we confess our sins, with self-loathing, self-indignation, self-judging, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins : and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." And when we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged. He never condemns that man that condemns himself, not notionally, but inwardly, with a concomitant hatred and loathing, which is somewhat else than the notion of the state and frame wherein you find yourself. But now, if you suppose that God will have no mercy upon such a one, that is to make a supposition to yourself of somewhat in the notion of God that is repugnant to the known notions of him : that is, as he is the God of all grace; as he is love itself, and as he hath told us this to be his name, "The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin." But if you have such notions of him, that he will abandon and throw away a self-loathing and self-judging creature, and one that desires nothing in all this world so much as to please him, this is to create to yourself a formidable idol, instead of the true and living God : there is no such God as you imagine to yourselves. As an idol is nothing in the world, so is this nothing but your own idol, which is a nullity. There is no such God ; but you create to yourselves such a formidable idol, and then hate him. You call that God, which is but of your own making, your own creature. But take God as he is in himself, and as he hath revealed and reported himself to be, the God of all grace, whose name this is, (and his name doth express his nature,) the name that he hath made himself known by, "The Lord, the Lord God, gracious : " take this true notion of God, and set it before your eyes, and consider, " though I be an object of hate, sure I have now before mine eyes an Object of the highest love." Is not this an Object of love, a fit Object, the most deserving Object, the most amiable Object that can be thought ? Conceive of him so ; and let that be your apprehensions of him, till you find his love gradually work itself into your souls, and transforming and changing you. And if you come once to this perceiving and believing this love, you have a love begotten and wrought in you, then God and you are happily met. Love and love, cannot but unite and dwell together, and will everlastingly cohabit and dwell together. But if you say, you are a wicked creature, and you desire to be always what you are ; if wickedness and you are inseparable, as they can only be by the union of your will with wickedness, then are misery and you united too, and can only be so by your adherence in heart and will to wickedness ; and so you will be your own hell, and an

everlasting fountain of misery to yourself; but God and his throne will be guiltless for ever, for he never hates a creature as a creature; his wrath can never reach you, but as you are one that continues in a will to be wicked.

But if you can truly say, "I would be otherwise, only I fear, God will not help me." Why! hath he not said, he will give his Spirit to them that ask him? You are to take heed of forming a notion of God against his word; for he can have no will against his word: it is impossible he should. There can be no counsel of the divine will that contradicts his plain word. Therefore, take heed of imagining any such thing to yourselves.

And so, upon the whole matter, there is place for that counsel, as what we are to resolve to live and die by, that is, never to entertain a slavish dread concerning our own eternal concerns. But consider how the distinguishing characters are given in Scripture, between them that are saved, and them that finally perish. And if you find the present characters upon you that mark you out for hell and damnation, only say, "I am such and such now, but it is not necessary that I should always be what I am." Sin is not you, and you are not sin; they are separable, these are partable things: and only implore that grace and help of the Divine Spirit that is offered, suitable to the estate of lost and apostate creatures. And never entertain any despairing thought but that that Spirit shall be given when it is seriously asked and sought after, and desired by you: the state of no man's case can exclude such considerations as these, for while there is any thing of sense about a man's eternal concerns, though it be from common grace, it is from the Spirit of grace, for all grace is from that Spirit, and that common grace may be gradually leading on to special grace, if it be duly complied with.

So that there is still no cause for a slavish dread: that soul is not quite abandoned and given up by God, in which remains any concern about its future state, and about its case Godward. You are not, indeed, to ascribe it to your own nature, if you are so solicitous about the divine favour, if you are not so swallowed up in this world, and immersed in sensuality, as to have all thoughts excluded about your soul-affairs, and your everlasting concerns. You are not to arrogate this to yourself; for we are not sufficient of ourselves to think a good thought: and there is a good tendency in those thoughts; and therefore, all this ought to be ascribed to the Divine Spirit that is now, some way or other, at work with you; and those workings of his, have a leadingness and tendency in them to move to further and

higher workings, which accordingly you are to expect with hope, and so to lay aside a slavish dread accompanied with despair, with utter despair that ever things shall be better with you.

(7.) And then, as to all your other concernments, intrust them freely and cheerfully to this God. He that worketh all things after the counsel of his own will; how complete an Object of trust is he! Whose heart would misgive him, who trusteth him that worketh all things after the counsel of his own will? Can the counsel of his own will, can the counsel of that will which is guided by unerring wisdom, ever hurt any body? Will any body be the worse for lying under the determination of that will, which is guided by unerring counsel? Never fear to trust him, in all things, who bears this character; a cheerful trust, a delightful trust, is most suitable to this representation of God. Never fret, never tumultuate, never admit of any distrustful thought; but at the same time, (as the direction is, Psalm 37, beginning.) “Trust in the Lord and do good,” and place your delight in the Lord, and not fret at any thing we see fall out in the world, never fret but trust, never fret but do good, never fret, but delight thyself in the Lord. And therefore,

(8.) Lastly; The direction that is most suitable to this apprehension of God, is to preserve a continual quietude and tranquillity in our own spirits. The proper effect of such trust is quietness: “His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.” And, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is staid on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” Isaiah 26. 3. There is no room, nor place for rational disquiet hereupon, in reference to any thing he hath done, or in reference to any thing we may apprehend he will do. Let there be such a constant calmness and tranquillity of spirit maintained, in opposition to vexation, about past events; and to solicitude about future events: for these two things, we are apt to disquiet ourselves: about past events, with vexation; and future events, with solicitude: and so we live uncomfortable lives. But there will be no place left, either for the one or the other, if we will but carry this apprehension about us, that God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. What cause then, can there be for solicitude? God will not change his nature, he will be still the same. He will as much govern the world by counsel in all future times, and all the particular concernments of his creatures, and especially our own concernments, in respect of which we are apt to be solicitous. He will do as much as ever he did. For this is his essential character, and therefore, can never cease to be so, that he doth all things after the counsels of his own will.

But you may say, "He may permit wicked men to do so and so, injuriously."

If he do so, he wisely permits it, and according to the counsel of his own will. And who would be afraid of the counsel of such a will? If he permit ill things to be done and fall out in the world, it is either for the exercise of their graces who belong to him in the world, and who are the called according to his purpose; it is that their faith, and their love to him, and their patience, and their subjection, and their heavenly mindedness, and the raisedness of their spirits above the world, may be more tried, and may further appear: or, it may be, for the correction and chastisement of his own offending people. And then, there is no place for fretting and inquietude of spirit, but calmly to accept the punishment of sin, lying down under it with a calm and submissive patience. Or, it may be in reference to the future, more illustrious display of his own glory, that he lets wicked men prosper and triumph for a time, and flourish like the green grass, when it is that they may be destroyed for ever. And never doubt but that he doth all things after the counsel of his own will, he will make all things finally to result into such an end as shall be suitable to so glorious an Agent, worthy of himself, so that angels and saints shall confess to all eternity, that all his ways and works were marvellous, just, righteous and great; and worthy of himself, taken altogether. It cannot but be so, that the issue of things must be such as is most agreeable to him "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."
