

## **“Predestination”**

From John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Book III, 21.5-7; 22; 23.1-14, 24.13-14, 17, English updated and emphasis added.

### ***Of the Eternal Election, by Which God Has Predestinated Some to Salvation, and Others to Destruction***

5. The predestination by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death, no man who would be thought pious ventures simply to deny; but it is greatly caviled at, especially by those who make prescience [i.e., a foreknowledge of what man will choose] its cause. We, indeed, ascribe both prescience and predestination to God; but we say, that it is absurd to make the latter subordinate to the former (see chap. 22, sec. 1.)

### ***The Biblical doctrine of prescience or foreknowledge***

When we attribute prescience to God, we mean that all things always were, and ever continue, under His eye; that to His knowledge there is no past or future, but all things are present, and indeed so present, that it is not merely the idea of them that is before Him (as those objects are which we retain in our memory) but that He truly sees and contemplates them as actually under His immediate inspection. This prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world, and to all creatures.

### ***The Biblical definition of predestination***

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which He determined with Himself whatever He wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.

This God has testified, not only in the case of single individuals; he has also given a specimen of it in the whole posterity of Abraham, to make it plain that the future condition of each nation lives entirely at His disposal: “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance” (Deuteronomy 32:8, 9). The separation is before the eyes of all; in the person of Abraham, as in a withered stock, one people is specially chosen, while the others are rejected; but the cause does not appear, except that Moses, to deprive posterity of any handle for glorying, tells them that their superiority was owing entirely to the free love of God. The cause which he assigns for their deliverance is, “Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their seed after them” (Deuteronomy 4:37); or more explicitly in another chapter, “The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people: for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you” (Deuteronomy 7:7, 8). He repeatedly makes the same intimations, “Behold, the heaven, and the heaven of heavens is the Lord your God’s, the earth also, with all that is in it. Only the Lord had a delight in your fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them” (Deuteronomy 10:14, 15). Again, in another passage, holiness is enjoined upon them, because they have been chosen to be a peculiar people; while in another, love is declared to be the cause of their protection (Deuteronomy 23:5). This, too, believers with one voice proclaim, “He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob, whom He

loved" (Psalm 47:4).

The endowments with which God had adorned them, they all ascribe to gratuitous love, not only because they knew that they had not obtained them by any merit, but that not even was the holy patriarch endued with a virtue that could procure such distinguished honor for himself and his posterity. And the more completely to crush all pride, He upbraids them with having merited nothing of the kind, seeing they were a rebellious and stiff-necked people (Deuteronomy 9:6). Often, also, do the prophets remind the Jews of this election by way of disparagement and opprobrium, because they had shamefully revolted from it.

***Many people object that election is in accordance with human worth or merit.***

Be this as it may, let those who would ascribe the election of God to human worth or merit come forward. When they see that one nation is preferred to all others, when they hear that it was no feeling of respect that induced God to show more favor to a small and ignoble body, no, even to the wicked and rebellious, will they plead against Him for having chosen to give such a manifestation of mercy? But neither will their obstreperous words hinder His work, nor will their invectives, like stones thrown against heaven, strike or hurt His righteousness; no, rather they will fall back on their own heads.

***Scripture replies that the covenant is a free gift bestowed by God on those whom He has chosen.***

To this principle of a free covenant, moreover, the Israelites are recalled whenever thanks are to be returned to God, or their hopes of the future to be animated. "The Lord He is God," says the Psalmist; "it is He that has made us, and not we ourselves: we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture" (Psalm 100:3; 95:7). The negation which is added, "not we ourselves," is not superfluous, to teach us that God is not only the author of all the good qualities in which men excel, but that they originate in Himself, there being nothing in them worthy of so much honor. In the following words also they are enjoined to rest satisfied with the mere good pleasure of God: "O ye seed of Abraham, His servant; ye children of Jacob, His chosen" (Psalm 105:6). And after an enumeration of the continual mercies of God as fruits of election, the conclusion is, that He acted thus kindly because He remembered His covenant. With this doctrine accords the song of the whole Church, "They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but Your right hand, and Your arm, and the light of Your countenance, because You favored them" (Psalm 44:3). It is to be observed, that when the land is mentioned, it is a visible symbol of the secret election in which adoption is comprehended.

To like gratitude David elsewhere exhorts the people, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance" (Psalm 33:12). Samuel thus animates their hopes, "The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake: because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people," (1 Samuel 12:22). And when David's faith is assailed, how does he arm himself for the battle? "Blessed is the man whom You choose, and cause to approach unto You, that he may dwell in Your courts" (Psalm 65:4). But as the hidden election of God was confirmed both by a first and second election, and by other intermediate mercies, Isaiah thus applies the terms "The Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel" (Isaiah 14:1). Referring to a future period, the gathering together of the dispersion, who seemed to have been abandoned, he says, that it will be a sign of a firm and stable election, notwithstanding of the apparent abandonment.

When it is elsewhere said, "I have chosen you, and not cast you away" (Isaiah 41:9), the continual course of His great liberality is ascribed to paternal [fatherly] kindness. This is stated more explicitly in Zechariah by the angel, the Lord "shall choose Jerusalem again," as if the severity of His chastisements had amounted to reprobation, or the captivity had been an interruption of election, which, however, remains inviolable, though the signs of it do not always appear.

***The stories of Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau***

6. We must add a second step of a more limited nature, or one in which the grace of God was displayed in a more special form, when of the same family of Abraham God rejected some, and by keeping others within His Church showed that He retained them among His sons.

At first Ishmael had obtained the same rank with his brother Isaac, because the spiritual covenant was equally sealed in him by the symbol of circumcision. He is first cut off, then Esau, at last an innumerable multitude, almost the whole of Israel. In Isaac was the seed called. The same calling held good in the case of Jacob. God gave a similar example in the rejection of Saul. This is also celebrated in the psalm, "Moreover He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: but chose the tribe of Judah" (Psalm 78:67, 68). This the sacred history sometimes repeats that the secret grace of God may be more admirably displayed in that change. I admit that it was by their own fault Ishmael, Esau, and others, fell from their adoption; for the condition annexed was, that they should faithfully keep the covenant of God, whereas they perfidiously violated it. The singular kindness of God consisted in this, that he had been pleased to prefer them to other nations; as it is said in the psalm, "He has not dealt so with any nation: and as for His judgments, they have not known them" (Psalm 147:20). But I had good reason for saying that two steps are here to be observed; for in the election of the whole nation, God had already shown that in the exercise of His mere liberality He was under no law but was free, so that He was by no means to be restricted to an equal division of grace, its very inequality proving it to be gratuitous.

Accordingly, Malachi enlarges on the ingratitude of Israel, in that being not only selected from the whole human race, but set peculiarly apart from a sacred household; they perfidiously and impiously spurn God, their beneficent parent. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau" (Malachi 1:2, 3). For God takes it for granted, that as both were the sons of a holy father, and successors of the covenant, in short, branches from a sacred root, the sons of Jacob were under no ordinary obligation for having been admitted to that dignity; but when by the rejection of Esau the first born, their progenitor though inferior in birth was made heir, He charges them with double ingratitude, in not being restrained by a double tie.

***God not only offers salvation to individuals, but He assigns it by His sovereign will.***

7. Although it is now sufficiently plain that God by His secret counsel chooses whom He will while He rejects others, His gratuitous election has only been partially explained until we come to the case of single individuals, to whom God not only offers salvation, but so assigns it, that the certainty of the result remains not dubious or suspended. These are considered as belonging to that one seed of which Paul makes mention (Romans 9:8; Galatians 3:16, etc.). For although adoption was deposited in the hand of Abraham, yet as many of his posterity were cut off as rotten members, in order that election may stand

and be effectual, it is necessary to ascend to the head in whom the heavenly Father has connected His elect with each other, and bound them to Himself by an indissoluble tie.

Thus in the adoption of the family of Abraham, God gave them a liberal display of favor which He has denied to others; but in the members of Christ there is a far more excellent display of grace, because those engrafted into Him as their head never fail to obtain salvation. Hence Paul skillfully argues from the passage of Malachi which I quoted (Romans 9:13; Malachi 1:2), that when God, after making a covenant of eternal life, invites any people to Himself, a special mode of election is in part understood, so that He does not with promiscuous grace effectually elect all of them. The words, "Jacob have I loved," refer to the whole progeny of the patriarch, which the prophet there opposes to the posterity of Esau. But there is nothing in this repugnant to the fact, that in the person of one man is set before us a specimen of election, which cannot fail of accomplishing its object. It is not without cause Paul observes, that these are called a remnant (Romans 9:27; 11:5); because experience shows that of the general body many fall away and are lost, so that often a small portion only remains.

### ***The remnant***

The reason why the general election of the people is not always firmly ratified, readily presents itself, namely, that on those with whom God makes the covenant, He does not immediately bestow the Spirit of regeneration, by whose power they persevere in the covenant even to the end. The external invitation, without the internal efficacy of grace which would have the effect of retaining them, holds a kind of middle place between the rejection of the human race and the election of a small number of believers. The whole people of Israel are called the Lord's inheritance, and yet there were many foreigners among them. Still, because the covenant which God had made to be their Father and Redeemer was not altogether null, He has respect to that free favor rather than to the perfidious defection of many; even by them His truth was not abolished, since by preserving some residue to Himself, it appeared that His calling was without repentance. When God ever and anon [presently] gathered His Church from among the sons of Abraham rather than from profane nations, He had respect to His covenant, which, when violated by the great body, He restricted to a few, that it might not entirely fail. In short, that common adoption of the seed of Abraham was a kind of visible image of a greater benefit which God deigned to bestow on some out of many.

This is the reason why Paul so carefully distinguishes between the sons of Abraham according to the flesh and the spiritual sons who are called after the example of Isaac. Not that simply to be a son of Abraham was a vain or useless privilege (this could not be said without insult to the covenant), but that the immutable counsel of God, by which He predestinated to Himself whomever He would, was alone effectual for their salvation.

But until the proper view is made clear by the production of passages of Scripture, I advise my readers not to prejudge the question. We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that **God by His eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was His pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction.**

We maintain that **this counsel, as regards the elect, is founded on His free mercy, without any respect to human worth, while those whom He dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment.**

In regard to the elect, we regard calling as the evidence of election, and justification as another symbol of its manifestation, until it is fully accomplished by the attainment of glory. But as the Lord seals His elect by calling and justification, so by excluding the reprobate either from the knowledge of His name or the sanctification of His Spirit, He by these marks in a manner discloses the judgment which awaits them.

I will here omit many of the fictions which foolish men have devised to overthrow predestination. There is no need of refuting objections which the moment they are produced abundantly betray their hollowness. I will dwell only on those points which either form the subject of dispute among the learned, or may occasion any difficulty to the simple, or may be employed by impiety as specious pretexts for assailing the justice of God.

### ***The Doctrine of Predestination Confirmed by Proofs from Scripture***

***Calvin responds to the objections of Arminians, Semi-Pelagians, and advocates of "free will" and an unbiblical "prescience".***

1. Many voice their objections to all the positions which we have laid down, especially the gratuitous [freely bestowed] election of believers, which, however, cannot be overthrown. For they commonly imagine that God distinguishes between men according to the merits which He foresees that each individual is to have, giving the adoption of sons to those whom He foreknows will not be unworthy of His grace, and dooming those to destruction whose dispositions He perceives will be prone to mischief and wickedness. Thus by interposing foreknowledge as a veil, they not only obscure election, but pretend to give it a different origin.

Nor is this the commonly received opinion of the vulgar [uneducated, common people] merely, for it has in all ages had great supporters (see sec. 8). This I candidly confess, lest anyone should expect greatly to prejudice our cause by opposing it with their names. The truth of God is here too certain to be shaken, too clear to be overborne by human authority.

Others who are neither versed in Scripture, nor entitled to any weight, assail sound doctrine with a petulance [contemptuousness] and improbity [dishonesty] which it is impossible to tolerate. Because God of His mere good pleasure electing some passes by others, they raise a plea against Him. But if the fact is certain, what can they gain by quarreling with God?

### ***The Biblical teachings explained***

We teach nothing but what experience proves to be true, namely, that God has always been at liberty to bestow His grace on whom He would. Not to ask in what respect the posterity [descendants] of Abraham excelled others if it be not in a worth, the cause of which has no existence outside of God, let them tell why men are better than oxen or asses. God might have made them dogs when He formed them in His own image. Will they allow the lower animals to expostulate with God, as if the inferiority of their condition were unjust? It is certainly not more equitable that men should enjoy the privilege which they have not acquired by any merit, than that He should variously distribute favors as seems to Him fitting.

If they pass to the case of individuals where inequality is more offensive to them, they ought at least, in regard to the example of our Savior, to be restrained by feelings of awe

from talking so confidently of this sublime mystery. He is conceived a mortal man of the seed of David; what, I would ask them, are the virtues by which He deserved to become in the very womb, the head of angels the only begotten Son of God, the image and glory of the Father, the light, righteousness, and salvation of the world? It is wisely observed by Augustine, that **in the very head of the Church we have a bright mirror of free election**, lest it should give any trouble to us the members, namely, that He did not become the Son of God by living righteously, but was freely presented with this great honor, that He might afterwards make others partakers of His gifts.

Should anyone here ask, why others are not what He was, or why we are all at so great a distance from Him, why we are all corrupt while He is purity, he would not only betray his madness, but his effrontery also. But if they are bent on depriving God of the free right of electing and reprobating, let them at the same time take away what has been given to Christ. It will now be proper to attend to what Scripture declares concerning each.

**When Paul declares that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world** (Ephesians 1:4), **he certainly shows that no regard is given to our own worth**; for it is just as if he had said, Since in the whole seed of Adam our heavenly Father found nothing worthy of His election, He turned His eye upon His own Anointed, that He might select as members of His body those whom He was to assume into the fellowship of life. Let believers, then, give full effect to this reason, namely, that we were in Christ adopted unto the heavenly inheritance, because in ourselves we were incapable of such excellence.

This he elsewhere observes in another passage, in which he exhorts the Colossians to give thanks that they had been made fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints (Colossians 1:12). **If election precedes that divine grace by which we are made fit to obtain immortal life, what can God find in us to induce Him to elect us?**

What I mean is still more clearly explained in another passage: God, says he, “has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Ephesians 1:4, 5). **Here he opposes the good pleasure of God to our merits of every description.**

2. That the proof may be more complete, it is of importance to attend to the separate clauses of that passage. When they are connected together they leave no doubt. From giving them the name of elect, it is clear that he is addressing believers, as indeed he shortly after declares. It is, therefore, a complete perversion of the name to confine it to the age in which the gospel was published. **By saying they were elected before the foundation of the world, he takes away all reference to worth.** For what ground of distinction was there between persons who as yet existed not, and persons who were afterwards like them to exist in Adam? But if they were elected in Christ, it follows not only that each was elected on some extrinsic ground, but that some were placed on a different footing from others, since we see that all are not members of Christ.

In the additional statement that they were elected that they might be holy, **the apostle openly refutes the error of those who deduce election from prescience, since he declares that whatever virtue appears in men is the result of election.**

Then, if a higher cause is asked, Paul answers that God so predestined, and predestined according to the good pleasure of His will. By these words, he overturns all

the grounds of election which men imagine to exist in themselves. For he shows that whatever favors God bestows in reference to the spiritual life flow from this one fountain, because God chose whom He would, and before they were born had the grace which He designed to bestow upon them set apart for their use.

**3. Wherever this good pleasure of God reigns, no good works are taken into account.** The Apostle, indeed, does not follow out the antithesis, but it is to be understood, as he himself explains it in another passage, "Who has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (1 Timothy 2:9). We have already shown that the additional words, "that we might be holy," remove every doubt.

***Arminians and Semi-Pelagians invert the order set forth by the apostle Paul in Holy Scripture.***

If you say that He foresaw they would be holy, and therefore elected them, you invert the order of Paul. You may, therefore, safely infer, if He elected us that we might be holy, He did not elect us because He foresaw that we would be holy. The two things are evidently inconsistent, namely, that the pious owe it to election that they are holy, and yet attain to election by means of works.

There is no force in the cavil to which they are ever recurring, that the Lord does not bestow election in recompense of preceding, but bestows it in consideration of future merits. For when it is said that believers were elected that they might be holy, it is at the same time intimated that the holiness which was to be in them has its origin in election.

And how can it be consistently said, that things derived from election are the cause of election? The very thing which the Apostle had said, he seems afterwards to confirm by adding, "According to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself" (Ephesians 1:9); for the expression that God "purposed in Himself," is the same as if it had been said, that in forming His decree He considered nothing external to Himself; and, accordingly, it is immediately subjoined, that **the whole object contemplated in our election is, that "we should be to the praise of His glory."**

**Assuredly divine grace would not deserve all the praise of election, were not election gratuitous [freely given]; and it would not be gratuitous did God in electing any individual pay regard to his future works.** Hence, what Christ said to His disciples is found to be universally applicable to all believers, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). Here He not only excludes past merits, but declares that they had nothing in themselves for which they could be chosen except in so far as His mercy anticipated. And how are we to understand the words of Paul, "Who has first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again?" (Romans 11:35).

**His meaning obviously is, that men are altogether indebted to the preventing goodness of God, there being nothing in them, either past or future, to conciliate His favor.**

4. In the Epistle to the Romans (Romans 9:6), in which he again treats this subject more reconditely and at greater length, he declares that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel;" for though all were blessed in respect of hereditary rights yet all did not equally obtain the succession. The whole discussion was occasioned by the pride and vain-glorying of the Jews, who, by claiming the name of the Church for themselves, would have made the faith of the Gospel dependent on their pleasure; just as in the present

day the Papists would fain under this pretext substitute themselves in place of God.

Paul, while he concedes that in respect of the covenant they were the holy offspring of Abraham, yet contends that the greater part of them were strangers to it, and that not only because they were degenerate, and so had become bastards instead of sons, but because the principal point to be considered was the special election of God, by which alone His adoption was ratified.

If the piety of some established them in the hope of salvation, and the revolt of others was the sole cause of their being rejected, it would have been foolish and absurd in Paul to carry his readers back to a secret election. But **if the will of God (no cause of which external to Him either appears or is to be looked for) distinguishes some from others, so that all the sons of Israel are not true Israelites, it is vain for anyone to seek the origin of his condition in himself.**

***The story of Jacob and Esau, as a picture of election and reprobation***

He afterwards prosecutes the subject at greater length, by contrasting the cases of Jacob and Esau. Both being sons of Abraham, both having been at the same time in the womb of their mother, there was something very strange in the change by which the honor of the birthright was transferred to Jacob, and yet Paul declares that the change was an attestation to the election of the one and the reprobation of the other.

**The question considered is the origin and cause of election.** The advocates of foreknowledge insist that it is to be found in the virtues and vices of men. For they take the short and easy method of asserting, that God showed in the person of Jacob, that He elects those who are worthy of His grace; and in the person of Esau, that He rejects those whom He foresees to be unworthy. Such is their confident assertion; but what does Paul say?

**“For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him who calls; it was said unto her [Rebecca] The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated” (Romans 9:11-13).** If foreknowledge had anything to do with this distinction of the brothers, the mention of time would have been out of place. Granting that Jacob was elected for a worth to be obtained by future virtues, to what end did Paul say that he was not yet born? Nor would there have been any occasion for adding, that as yet he had done no good, because the answer was always ready, that nothing is hidden from God, and that therefore the piety of Jacob was present before Him. If works procure favor, a value ought to have been put upon them before Jacob was born, just as if he had been of full age.

But in explaining the difficulty, the Apostle goes on to show, that the adoption of Jacob proceeded not on works but on the calling of God. In works he makes no mention of past or future, but distinctly opposes them to the calling of God, intimating, that when place is given to the one the other is overthrown; as if he had said, The only thing to be considered is what pleased God, not what men furnished of themselves.

Lastly, it is certain that all the causes which men are accustomed to devise as external to the secret counsel of God, are excluded by the use of the terms purpose and election.

**5. Why should men attempt to darken these statements by assigning some place in election to past or future works?** This is altogether to evade what the Apostle



contends for, namely, that the distinction between the brothers is not founded on any ground of works, but on the mere calling of God, inasmuch as it was fixed before the children were born.

Had there been any solidity in this subtlety, it would not have escaped the notice of the Apostle, but being perfectly aware that God foresaw no good in man, save [except] that which He had already previously determined to bestow by means of His election, He does not employ a preposterous arrangement which would make good works antecedent to their cause.

**We learn from the Apostle's words, that the salvation of believers is founded entirely on the decree of divine election, that the privilege is procured not by works but free calling.** We have also a specimen of the thing itself set before us.

Esau and Jacob are brothers, begotten of the same parents, within the same womb, not yet born. In them all things are equal, and yet the judgment of God with regard to them is different. He adopts the one and rejects the other. The only right of precedence was that of primogeniture [the rights of the firstborn]; but that is disregarded, and the younger is preferred to the elder. No, in the case of others, God seems to have disregarded primogeniture for the express purpose of excluding the flesh from all ground of boasting. Rejecting Ishmael He gives His favor to Isaac, postponing Manasseh He honors Ephraim.

6. Should anyone object that these minute and inferior favors do not enable us to decide with regard to the future life, that it is not to be supposed that he who received the honor of primogeniture was thereby adopted to the inheritance of heaven; (many objectors do not even spare Paul, but accuse him of having in the quotation of these passages wrested Scripture from its proper meaning); I answer as before, that the Apostle has not erred through inconsideration, or spontaneously misapplied the passages of Scripture; but he saw (what these men cannot be brought to consider) that God purposed under an earthly sign to declare the spiritual election of Jacob, which otherwise lay hidden at His inaccessible tribunal.

For unless we refer the primogeniture bestowed upon him to the future world, the form of blessing would be altogether vain and ridiculous, inasmuch as he gained nothing by it but a multitude of toils and annoyances, exile, sharp sorrows, and bitter cares.

Therefore, when Paul knew beyond a doubt that by the external, God manifested the spiritual and unfading blessings, which He had prepared for His servant in His kingdom, he hesitated not in proving the latter to draw an argument from the former. For we must remember that the land of Canaan was given in pledge of the heavenly inheritance; and that therefore there cannot be a doubt that Jacob was like the angels engrafted into the body of Christ, that he might be a partaker of the same life.

### ***The sovereignty of God in salvation set forth***

**Jacob, therefore, is chosen, while Esau is rejected; the predestination of God makes a distinction where none existed in respect of merit.** If you ask the reason the Apostle gives it, "For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Romans 9:15). And what, I ask, does this mean? **It is just a clear declaration by the Lord that He finds nothing in men themselves to induce Him to show kindness, that it is owing entirely to His own mercy, and, accordingly, that their salvation is His own work.** Since God places your salvation in Himself alone, why should you descend to yourself?

Since He assigns you His own mercy alone, why will you recur to your own merits? Since He confines your thoughts to His own mercy why do you turn partly to the view of your own works?

***Christians are the elect remnant, those foreknown of God.***

We must therefore come to that smaller number whom Paul elsewhere describes as foreknown of God (Romans 11:2); not foreknown, as these men imagine, by idle, inactive contemplations but in the sense which it often bears. For surely when Peter says that Christ was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23), he does not represent God as contemplating merely, but as actually accomplishing our salvation. Thus also Peter, in saying that the believers to whom he writes are elect “according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Peter 1:2), properly expresses that secret predestination by which God has sealed those whom He has been pleased to adopt as sons.

In using the term purpose as synonymous with a term which uniformly denotes what is called a fixed determination, he undoubtedly shows that God, in being the author of our salvation, does not go beyond Himself. In this sense he says in the same chapters that Christ as “a lamb” “was foreordained before the creation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19, 20). What could have been more frigid or absurd than to have represented God as looking from the height of heaven to see from where the salvation of the human race was to come?

By a people foreknown, Peter means the same thing as Paul does by a remnant selected from a multitude falsely assuming the name of God. In another passage, to suppress the vain boasting of those who, while only covered with a mask, claim for themselves in the view of the world a first place among the godly, Paul says, “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Timothy 2:19). In short, by that term he designates two classes of people, the one consisting of the whole race of Abraham, the other a people separated from that race, and though hidden from human view, yet open to the eye of God.

And there is no doubt that he took the passage from Moses, who declares that God would be merciful to whomsoever He pleased (although He was speaking of an elect people whose condition was apparently equal); just as if He had said, that in a common adoption was included a special grace which He bestows on some as a holier treasure, and that there is nothing in the common covenant to prevent this number from being exempted from the common order. God being pleased in this matter to act as a free dispenser and disposer, distinctly declares, that **the only ground on which He will show mercy to one rather than to another is His sovereign pleasure**; for when mercy is bestowed on him who asks it, though he indeed does not suffer a refusal, he, however, either anticipates or partly acquires a favor, the whole merit of which God claims for Himself.

7. Now, let the supreme Judge and Master decide on the whole case. Seeing such obduracy in His hearers, that His words fell upon the multitude almost without fruit, He to remove this stumbling-block exclaims, “All that the Father gives me shall come to Me.” “And this is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all that He has given me I should lose nothing” (John 6:37, 39). Observe that the donation of the Father is the first step in our delivery into the charge and protection of Christ.

Someone, perhaps, will here turn round and object, that those only peculiarly belong to the Father who make a voluntary surrender by faith. But the only thing which Christ maintains is that though the defections of vast multitudes should shake the world, yet the counsel of God would stand firm, more stable than heaven itself, that **His election would never fail.**

The elect are said to have belonged to the Father before He bestowed them on His only begotten Son. It is asked if they were His by nature? No, they were aliens, but He makes them His by delivering them.

The words of Christ are too clear to be rendered obscure by any of the mists of caviling. "No man can come to me except the Father who has sent Me draw him." "Every man, therefore, that has heard and learned of the Father comes unto me" (John 6:44, 45). Did all promiscuously bend the knee to Christ, election would be common; whereas now in the small number of believers a manifest diversity appears. Accordingly our Savior, shortly after declaring that the disciples who were given to Him were the common property of the Father, adds, "I pray not for the world, but for those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours" (John 17:9). **Hence it is that the whole world no longer belongs to its Creator, except insofar as grace rescues from malediction [curse], divine wrath, and eternal death, some, not many, who would otherwise perish, while He leaves the world to the destruction to which it is doomed.**

Meanwhile, though Christ interpose as a Mediator, yet He claims the right of electing in common with the Father, "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen" (John 13:18). If it is asked from where He has chosen them, He answers in another passage "Out of the world"; which He excludes from His prayers when He commits His disciples to the Father (John 15:19). We must, indeed hold, when He affirms that He knows whom He has chosen, first, that some individuals of the human race are denoted; and, secondly, that they are not distinguished by the quality of their virtues, but by a heavenly decree.

Hence it follows, that **since Christ makes Himself the author of election, none excel by their own strength or industry.** In elsewhere numbering Judas among the elect, though he was a devil (John 6:70), he refers only to the apostolical office, which though a bright manifestation of divine favor (as Paul so often acknowledges it to be in his own person), does not, however, contain within itself the hope of eternal salvation. Judas, therefore, when he discharged the office of Apostle perfidiously, might have been worse than a devil; but **not one of those whom Christ has once engrafted into His body will He ever permit to perish**, for in securing their salvation, He will perform what He has promised; that is, exert a divine power greater than all (John 10:28). For when He says, "Those that You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition" (John 17:12), the expression, though there is a catachresis [a deliberately paradoxical figure of speech] in it, is not at all ambiguous. The sum is, that God by gratuitous [freely given] adoption forms those whom He wishes to have for sons; but that the intrinsic cause is in Himself, because He is contented with His secret pleasure.

***The errant views of Ambrose, Origen, and Jerome, contrasted with the reformed views of Augustine.***

8. But Ambrose, Origen, and Jerome, were of the opinion, that God dispenses His grace among men according to the use which He foresees that each will make of it. It may be added, that Augustine also was for some time of this opinion; but after he had made greater progress in the knowledge of Scripture, he not only retracted it as evidently false,

but powerfully confuted [decisively refuted] it (August. *Retract.* Lib. 1, c. 13). No, even after the retractation, glancing at the Pelagians who still persisted in that error, he says, "Who does not wonder that the Apostle failed to make this most acute observation? For after stating a most startling proposition concerning those who were not yet born, and afterwards putting the question to himself by way of objection, 'What then? Is there unrighteousness with God?' he had an opportunity of answering, that God foresaw the merits of both, he does not say so, but has recourse to the justice and mercy of God" (August. *Epist.* 106, ad Sixtum).

And in another passage, after excluding all merit before election, he says, "Here, certainly, there is no place for the vain argument of those who defend the foreknowledge of God against the grace of God, and accordingly maintain that we were elected before the foundation of the world, because God foreknew that we would be good, not that He Himself would make us good. This is not the language of Him who says, 'Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you,' (John 15:16). For had He chosen us because He foreknew that we would be good, he would at the same time also have foreknown that we were to choose Him" (August. in *Joann.* 8, see also what follows to the same effect).

Let the testimony of Augustine prevail with those who willingly acquiesce in the authority of the Fathers: although Augustine allows not that he differs from the others, but shows by clear evidence that the difference which the Pelagians invidiously objected to him is unfounded. For he quotes from Ambrose (*Lib. de Praedest. Sanct.* cap. 19): "Christ calls whom He pities." Again, "Had He pleased He could have made them devout instead of undevout; but God calls whom He deigns to call, and makes religious whom He will."

Were we disposed to frame an entire volume out of Augustine, it were easy to show the reader that I have no occasion to use any other words than his: but I am unwilling to burden him with a prolix [wordy] statement.

But assuming that the fathers did not speak thus, let us attend to the thing itself. A difficult question had been raised, namely, Did God do justly in bestowing His grace on certain individuals? Paul might have disencumbered himself of this question at once by saying, that God had respect to works. Why does he not do so? Why does he rather continue to use a language which leaves him exposed to the same difficulty? Why, but just because it would not have been right to say it? There was no obliviousness on the part of the Holy Spirit, who was speaking by his mouth. He, therefore, answers without ambiguity, that **God favors His elect, because He is pleased to do so, and shows mercy because He is pleased to do so.** For the words, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exodus 33:19), are the same in effect as if it had been said, God is moved to mercy by no other reason than that He is pleased to show mercy. Augustine's declaration, therefore, remains true. **The grace of God does not find, but makes persons fit to be chosen.**

### ***Was Thomas Aquinas a Protestant?***

9. Nor let us be detained by the subtlety of Thomas, that the foreknowledge of merit is the cause of predestination, not, indeed, in respect of the predestinating act, but that on our part it may in some sense be so called, namely, in respect of a particular estimate of predestination; as when it is said, that God predestinates man to glory according to his merit, inasmuch as He decreed to bestow on him the grace by which he merits glory. For while the Lord would have us to see nothing more in election than His mere goodness, for anyone to desire to see more is preposterous affectation. But were we to make a trial of subtlety, it would not be difficult to refute the sophistry of Thomas.

### ***Thomas Aquinas's errant teaching***

He maintains that the elect are in a manner predestinated to glory on account of their merits, because God predestines to give them the grace by which they merit glory. What if I should, on the contrary, object that predestination to grace is subservient to election unto life, and follows as its handmaid; that grace is predestined to those to whom the possession of glory was previously assigned the Lord being pleased to bring His sons by election to justification? For it will hence follow that the predestination to glory is the cause of the predestination to grace, and not the converse.

But let us be done with these disputes as superfluous among those who think that there is enough of wisdom for them in the word of God. For it has been truly said by an old ecclesiastical [church] writer, Those who ascribe the election of God to merits, are wise above what they ought to be, (Ambrose. de Vocat. Gentium, lib. 1, c. 2).

**10. Some object that God would be inconsistent with Himself, in inviting all without distinction while He elects only a few.** Thus, according to them, the universality of the promise destroys the distinction of special grace. Some moderate men speak in this way, not so much for the purpose of suppressing the truth, as to get rid of puzzling questions, and curb excessive curiosity. The intention is laudable, but the design is by no means to be approved, dissimulation being at no time excusable. In those again who display their petulance, we see only a vile cavil or a disgraceful error.

The mode in which **Scripture reconciles the two things, namely, that by external preaching all are called to faith and repentance, and that yet the Spirit of faith and repentance is not given to all**, I have already explained, and will again shortly repeat. But the point which they assume I deny as false in two respects: for He who threatens that when it shall rain on one city there will be drought in another (Amos 4:7); and declares in another passage, that there will be a famine of the word (Amos 8:11), does not lay Himself under a fixed obligation to call all equally. And he who, forbidding Paul to preach in Asia and leading him away from Bithynia, carries him over to Macedonia, (Acts 16:6), shows that it belongs to Him to distribute the treasure in what way He pleases.

But it is by Isaiah He more clearly demonstrates how He destines the promises of salvation specially to the elect (Isaiah 8:16); for He declares that His disciples would consist of them only, and not indiscriminately of the whole human race. From which it is evident that **the doctrine of salvation, which is said to be set apart for the sons of the Church only, is abused when it is represented as effectually available to all**. For the present let it suffice to observe, that though the word of the gospel is addressed generally to all, yet the gift of faith is rare.

Isaiah assigns the cause when he says that the arm of the Lord is not revealed to all, (Isaiah 53:1). Had he said, that the gospel is malignantly and perversely condemned, because many obstinately refuse to hear, there might perhaps be some color for this universal call. It is not the purpose of the Prophet, however, to extenuate the guilt of men, when he states the source of their blindness to be, that God deigns [grants] not to reveal His arm to them; he only reminds us that since faith is a special gift, it is in vain that external doctrine sounds in the ear.

But I would fain know from those doctors whether it is mere preaching or faith that makes men sons of God. Certainly when it is said, "As many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on His name"

(John 1:12), a confused mass is not set before us, but a special order is assigned to **believers, who are “born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”**

But it is said, there is a mutual agreement between faith and the word. That must be wherever there is faith. But it is no new thing for the seed to fall among thorns or in stony places; not only because the majority appear in fact to be rebellious against God, but because all are not gifted with eyes and ears. How, then, can it consistently be said, that God calls while He knows that the called will not come? Let Augustine answer for me: “Would you dispute with me? Wonder with me, and exclaim, O the depth! Let us both agree in dread, lest we perish in error” (August. de Verb. Apost. Serm. 11).

Moreover, if **election is**, as Paul declares, **the parent of faith**, I retort the argument, and maintain that faith is not general, since election is special. For it is easily inferred from the series of causes and effects, when Paul says, that the Father “has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:3, 4), that these riches are not common to all, because God has chosen only whom He would.

And the reason why in another passage he commends the faith of the elect is, to prevent anyone from supposing that he acquires faith of his own nature; since **to God alone belongs the glory of freely illuminating those whom He had previously chosen** (Titus 1:1). For it is well said by Bernard, “His friends hear apart when He says to them, Fear not, little flock: to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom. Who are these? Those whom He foreknew and predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. He has made known His great and secret counsel. The Lord knows those who are His, but that which was known to God was manifested to men; nor, indeed, does He condescend to give a participation in this great mystery to any except those whom He foreknew and predestinated to be His own” (Bernard. *Epist.* 107 ad Thomas Praepos. Benerlae.). Shortly after he concludes, “The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him; from everlasting through predestination, to everlasting through glorification: the one knows no beginning, the other no end.”

But why cite Bernard as a witness, when we hear from the lips of our Master, “Not that any man has seen the Father, save [except] he who is of God”? (John 6:46). By these words He intimates that all who are not regenerated by God are amazed at the brightness of His countenance.

And, indeed, **faith is aptly conjoined with election, provided it hold the second place**. This order is clearly expressed by our Savior in these words, “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given me I should lose nothing;” “And this is the will of Him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life” (John 6:39, 40). If He would have all to be saved, He would appoint His Son their guardian, and would engraft them all into His body by the sacred bond of faith.

It is now clear that **faith is a singular pledge of paternal love, treasured up for the sons whom He has adopted**. Hence Christ elsewhere says, that the sheep follow the shepherd because they know his voice, but that they will not follow a stranger, because they know not the voice of strangers (John 10:4). But from where comes that distinction, unless that their ears have been divinely bored? **For no man makes himself a sheep, but is formed by heavenly grace**. And why does the Lord declare that our salvation

will always be sure and certain, but just because it is guarded by the invincible power of God? (John 10:29).

Accordingly, He concludes that unbelievers are not of His sheep (John 10:16). The reason is, because they are not of the number of those who, as the Lord promised by Isaiah, were to be His disciples. Moreover, as the passages which I have quoted imply perseverance, they are also attestations to the inflexible constancy of election.

### ***Reprobation further explained***

11. We come now to the reprobate, to whom the Apostle at the same time refers, (Romans 9:13). For as Jacob, who as yet had merited nothing by good works, is assumed into favor; so Esau, while as yet unpolluted by any crime, is hated.

If we turn our view to works, we do injustice to the Apostle, as if he had failed to see the very thing which is clear to us. Moreover, there is complete proof of his not having seen it, since he expressly insists that when as yet they had done neither good nor evil, the one was elected, the other rejected, **in order to prove that the foundation of divine predestination is not in works.**

Then after starting the objection, Is God unjust? instead of employing what would have been the surest and plainest defense of his justice, namely, that God had recompensed Esau according to his wickedness, he is contented with a different solution, namely, **that the reprobate are expressly raised up, in order that the glory of God may thereby be displayed.**

At last, he concludes that God has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardens (Romans 9:18). You see how he refers both to the mere pleasure of God.

**Therefore, if we cannot assign any reason for His bestowing mercy on His people, but just that it so pleases Him, neither can we have any reason for His reprobating others but His will.** When God is said to visit in mercy or harden whom He will, men are reminded that they are not to seek for any cause beyond His will.

### ***Refutation of the Calumnies by Which This Doctrine Is Always Unjustly Assailed***

1. The human mind, when it hears this doctrine, cannot restrain its petulance, but boils and rages as if aroused by the sound of a trumpet. Many professing a desire to defend the Deity from an invidious charge admit the doctrine of election, but deny that any one is reprobated (Bernard. in Die Ascensionis, Serm. 2). This they do ignorantly and childishly since **there could be no election without its opposite reprobation.**

God is said to set apart those whom He adopts for salvation. It were most absurd to say, that He admits others fortuitously, or that they by their industry acquire what election alone confers on a few.

**Those, therefore, whom God passes by He reprobates, and that for no other cause but because He is pleased to exclude them from the inheritance which He predestines to His children.**

Nor is it possible to tolerate the petulance of men, in refusing to be restrained by the word of God, in regard to His incomprehensible counsel, which even angels adore. We have already been told that hardening is not less under the immediate hand of God than mercy.

Paul does not, after the example of those whom I have mentioned, labor anxiously to defend God, by calling in the aid of falsehood; he only reminds us that it is unlawful for the creature to quarrel with its Creator.

***Jesus taught the doctrine of reprobation***

Then how will those who refuse to admit that any are reprobated by God explain the following words of Christ? "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13). They are plainly told that all whom the heavenly Father has not been pleased to plant as sacred trees in His garden, are doomed and devoted to destruction. If they deny that this is a sign of reprobation, there is nothing, however clear, that, can be proved to them.

***Paul taught the doctrine of reprobation.***

But if they will still murmur, let us in the soberness of faith rest contented with the admonition of Paul, that it can be no ground of complaint that God, "willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction: and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory" (Romans 9:22, 23). Let my readers observe that Paul, to cut off all handle for murmuring and detraction, attributes supreme sovereignty to the wrath and power of God; for it were unjust that those profound judgments, which transcend all our powers of discernment, should be subjected to our calculation.

It is frivolous in our opponents to reply, that God does not altogether reject those whom in levity He tolerates, but remains in suspense with regard to them, if per adventure [perhaps] they may repent; as if Paul were representing God as patiently waiting for the conversion of those whom He describes as fitted for destruction.

For Augustine, rightly expounding this passage, says that where power is united to endurance, God does not permit, but rules (August. Cont. Julian., Lib. 5, c. 5). They add also, that it is not without cause the vessels of wrath are said to be fitted for destruction, and that God is said to have prepared the vessels of mercy, because in this way the praise of salvation is claimed for God, whereas the blame of perdition is thrown upon those who of their own accord bring it upon themselves.

But were I to concede that by the different forms of expression Paul softens the harshness of the former clause, it by no means follows, that he transfers the preparation for destruction to any other cause than the secret counsel of God. This, indeed, is asserted in the preceding context, where God is said to have raised up Pharaoh, and to harden whom He will. Hence it follows, that **the hidden counsel of God is the cause of hardening.**

I at least hold with Augustine that when God makes sheep out of wolves, He forms them again by the powerful influence of grace, that their hardness may thus be subdued, and that He does not convert the obstinate, because He does not exert that more powerful



grace, a grace which He has at command, if He were disposed to use it (August. de Praedest. Sanct., Lib. 1, c. 2).

2. These observations would be amply sufficient for the pious and modest, and such as remember that they are men. But because many are the species of blasphemy which these virulent dogs utter against God, we shall, as far as the case admits, give an answer to each. Foolish men raise many grounds of quarrel with God, as if they held Him subject to their accusations.

***The objection that it is unjust for God to reprobate the “innocent” betrays a lack of knowledge of the true God and His nature.***

First, they ask why God is offended with His creatures who have not provoked Him by any previous offense; for to devote to destruction whomsoever He pleases, more resembles the caprice of a tyrant than the legal sentence of a judge; and, therefore, there is reason to expostulate with God, if at His mere pleasure men are, without any desert of their own, predestinated to eternal death.

If at any time thoughts of this kind come into the minds of the pious, they will be sufficiently armed to repress them, by considering **how sinful it is to insist on knowing the causes of the divine will, since it is itself, and justly ought to be, the cause of all that exists.** For if His will has any cause, there must be something antecedent [prior] to it, and to which it is annexed; this it were impious to imagine. **The will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which He wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of His willing it. Therefore, when it is asked why the Lord did so, we must answer, Because He pleased.**

But if you proceed farther to ask why He pleased, you ask for something greater and more sublime than the will of God, and nothing such can be found. Let human temerity [recklessness] then be quiet, and cease to inquire after what exists not, lest perhaps it fails to find what does exist. This, I say, will be sufficient to restrain anyone who would reverently contemplate the secret things of God. Against the audacity of the wicked, who hesitate not openly to blaspheme, God will sufficiently defend Himself by His own righteousness, without our assistance, when depriving their consciences of all means of evasion, He shall hold them under conviction, and make them feel their guilt. We, however, give no countenance to the fiction of absolute power, which, as it is heathenish [pagan], so it ought justly to be held in detestation by us.

**We do not imagine God to be lawless. He is a law to Himself;** because, as Plato says, men laboring under the influence of concupiscence [evil desires] need law; but **the will of God is not only free from all vice, but is the supreme standard of perfection, the law of all laws.** But we deny that He is bound to give an account of His procedure; and we moreover deny that we are fit of our own ability to give judgment in such a case. Wherefore, when we are tempted to go farther than we ought, let this consideration deter us, You shall be “justified when You speak, and blameless when You judge” (Psalm 51:4).

3. God may thus quell His enemies by silence. But lest we should allow them with impunity to hold His sacred name in derision, He supplies us with weapons against them from His word. Accordingly, when we are accosted in such terms as these, Why did God from the first predestine some to death, when, as they were not yet in existence, they could not have merited the sentence of death? let us by way of reply ask in our turn,

**What do you imagine that God owes to man, if He is pleased to estimate him by His own nature?**

***In our natural condition, as the fallen descendants of Adam, we all are children destined for wrath (Ephesians 2:3).***

As we are all vitiated [debased] by sin, we cannot but be hateful to God, and that not from tyrannical cruelty, but the strictest justice. But if all whom the Lord predestines to death are naturally liable to sentence of death, of what injustice, pray, do they complain? Should all the sons of Adam come to dispute and contend with their Creator, because by His eternal providence they were before their birth doomed to perpetual destruction, when God comes to reckon with them, what will they be able to mutter against this defense? If all are taken from a corrupt mass, it is not strange that all are subject to condemnation. **Let them not, therefore, charge God with injustice, if by His eternal judgment they are doomed to a death to which they themselves feel that whether they will or not they are drawn spontaneously by their own nature.**

***God is the author of reprobation, but the reprobate bear their own guilt as fallen creatures. In Adam's first sin, we all fell. Only by the grace of God is anyone redeemed and delivered from the curse of sin and death.***

Hence it appears how perverse is this affectation of murmuring, when of set purpose they suppress the cause of condemnation which they are compelled to recognize in themselves, that they may lay the blame upon God. But though I should confess a hundred times that God is the author (and it is most certain that He is), they do not, however, thereby efface their own guilt, which, engraven on their own consciences, is ever and anon [presently] presenting itself to their view.

4. They again object, Were not men predestinated by the ordination of God to that corruption [man's fallen nature] which is now held forth as the cause of condemnation? If so, when they perish in their corruptions they do nothing else than suffer punishment for that calamity, into which, by the predestination of God, Adam fell, and dragged all his posterity headlong with him. Is not He, therefore, unjust in thus cruelly mocking His creatures?

I admit that **by the will of God all the sons of Adam fell into that state of wretchedness in which they are now involved**; and this is just what I said at the first, that we must always return to the mere pleasure of the divine will, the cause of which is hidden in Himself. But it does not immediately follow that God lies open to this charge. For we will answer with Paul in these words, "On the contrary, who are you, O man, to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this? Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?" (Romans 9:20, 21).

They will deny that the justice of God is thus truly defended, and will allege that we seek an evasion, such as those are accustomed to employ who have no good excuse. For what more seems to be said here than just that the power of God is such as cannot be hindered, so that He can do whatsoever He pleases? But it is far otherwise.

**For what stronger reason can be given than when we are ordered to reflect who God is? How could He who is the Judge of the world commit any unrighteousness? If it properly belongs to the nature of God to do judgment, He must naturally love justice and abhor injustice.**

Wherefore, the Apostle did not, as if he had been caught in a difficulty, have recourse to evasion; he only intimated that the procedure of divine justice is too high to be scanned by human measure, or comprehended by the feebleness of human intellect. The Apostle, indeed, confesses that in the divine judgments there is a depth in which all the minds of men must be engulfed if they attempt to penetrate into it. But he also shows how unbecoming it is to reduce the works of God to such a law as that we can presume to condemn them the moment they accord not with our reason.

There is a well-known saying of Solomon (which, however, few properly understand), "The great God who formed all things both rewards the fool and rewards transgressors" (Proverbs 26:10). For he is speaking of the greatness of God, whose pleasure it is to inflict punishment on fools and transgressors though He is not pleased to bestow His Spirit upon them. It is a monstrous infatuation in men to seek to subject that which has no bounds to the little measure of their reason.

Paul gives the name of elect to the angels who maintained their integrity. If their steadfastness was owing to the good pleasure of God, the revolt of the others proves that they were abandoned. Of this no other cause can be adduced than reprobation, which is hidden in the secret counsel of God.

5. Now, should some Manes or Coelestinus come forward to arraign Divine Providence, (see sec. 8), I say with Paul, that no account of it can be given, because by its magnitude it far surpasses our understanding. Is there anything strange or absurd in this? Would we have the power of God so limited as to be unable to do more than our mind can comprehend? I say with Augustine, that the Lord has created those who, as He certainly foreknew, were to go to destruction, and He did so because He so willed. Why He willed it is not ours to ask, as we cannot comprehend, nor can it become us even to raise a controversy as to the justice of the divine will. Whenever we speak of it, we are speaking of the supreme standard of justice (See August. Ep. 106). But when justice clearly appears, why should we raise any question of injustice?

Let us not, therefore, be ashamed to stop their mouths after the example of Paul. Whenever they presume to carp, let us begin to repeat: Who are ye, miserable men, that bring an accusation against God, and bring it because He does not adapt the greatness of His works to your meager capacity? As if everything must be perverse that is hidden from the flesh. The immensity of the divine judgments is known to you by clear experience. You know that they are called "a great deep" (Psalm 36:6). Now, look at the narrowness of your own minds and say whether it can comprehend the decrees of God.

Why then should you, by infatuated inquisitiveness, plunge yourselves into an abyss which reason itself tells you will prove your destruction? Why are you not deterred, in some degree at least, by what the Book of Job, as well as the Prophetical books declare concerning the incomprehensible wisdom and dreadful power of God? If your mind is troubled, decline not to embrace the counsel of Augustine, "You a man expect an answer from me: I also am a man. Wherefore, let us both listen to Him who says, 'O man, who are you?' Believing ignorance is better than presumptuous knowledge. Seek merits; you will find nothing but punishment. O the height! Peter denies, a thief believes. O the height! Do you ask the reason? I will tremble at the height. Reason you, I will wonder; dispute you, I will believe. I see the height; I cannot sound the depth. Paul found rest, because he found wonder. He calls the judgments of God 'unsearchable;' and have you come to search them? He says that His ways are 'past finding out,' and do you seek to find them out?" (August. de Verb. Apost. Serm. 20). We shall gain nothing by

proceeding farther. For neither will the Lord satisfy the petulance of these men, nor does He need any other defense than that which He used by His Spirit, who spoke by the mouth of Paul. We unlearn the art of speaking well when we cease to speak with God.

6. Impiety starts another objection, which, however, seeks not so much to criminate God as to excuse the sinner; though he who is condemned by God as a sinner cannot ultimately be acquitted without impugning the judge. This, then is the scoffing language which profane tongues employ. Why should God blame men for things the necessity of which He has imposed by His own predestination? What could they do? Could they struggle with His decrees? It were in vain for them to do it, since they could not possibly succeed. It is not just, therefore, to punish them for things the principal cause of which is in the predestination of God.

Here I will abstain from a defense to which ecclesiastical writers usually recur, that there is nothing in the prescience [foreknowledge] of God to prevent Him from regarding man as a sinner, since the evils which He foresees are man's, not His. This would not stop the caviler, who would still insist that God might, if He had pleased, have prevented the evils which He foresaw, and not having done so, must with determinate counsel have created man for the very purpose of so acting on the earth. But if by the providence of God man was created on the condition of afterwards doing whatever he does, then that which he cannot escape, and which he is constrained by the will of God to do, cannot be charged upon him as a crime. Let us, therefore, see what is the proper method of solving the difficulty.

First, all must admit what Solomon says, "The Lord has made all things for Himself; yes, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Proverbs 16:4). Now, since the arrangement of all things is in the hand of God, since to Him belongs the disposal of life and death, He arranges all things by His sovereign counsel, in such a way that **individuals are born, who are doomed from the womb to certain death, and are to glorify Him by their destruction.**

If anyone alleges that no necessity is laid upon them by the providence of God, but rather that they are created by Him in that condition, because He foresaw their future depravity, he says something, but does not say enough. Ancient writers, indeed, occasionally employ this solution, though with some degree of hesitation. The Schoolmen, again, rest in it as if it could not be gainsaid. I, for my part, am willing to admit, that mere prescience [foreknowledge] lays no necessity on the creatures; though some do not assent to this, but hold that it is itself the cause of things. But Valla, though otherwise not greatly skilled in sacred matters, seems to me to have taken a shrewder and more acute view, when he shows that the dispute is superfluous since life and death are acts of the divine will rather than of prescience. If God merely foresaw human events, and did not also arrange and dispose of them at His pleasure, there might be room for agitating the question, how far His foreknowledge amounts to necessity; but **since He foresees the things which are to happen, simply because He has decreed that they are so to happen, it is vain to debate about prescience, while it is clear that all events take place by His sovereign appointment.**

***The fall of man and federal headship ("in Adam's fall, we sinned all")***

7. They deny that it is ever said in distinct terms, God decreed that Adam should perish by his revolt. As if the same God, who is declared in Scripture to do whatsoever He pleases, could have made the noblest of His creatures without any special purpose.

They say that, in accordance with free-will, he was to be the architect of his own fortune, that God had decreed nothing but to treat him according to his desert. If this frigid fiction is received, where will be the omnipotence of God, by which, according to His secret counsel on which everything depends, He rules over all?

**But whether they will allow it or not, predestination is manifest in Adam's posterity.** It was not owing to nature that they all lost salvation by the fault of one parent. Why should they refuse to admit with regard to one man that which against their will they admit with regard to the whole human race? Why should they in caviling lose their labor? **Scripture proclaims that all were, in the person of one, made liable to eternal death.** As this cannot be ascribed to nature, it is plain that it is owing to the wonderful counsel of God. It is very absurd in these worthy defenders of the justice of God to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. I again ask how it is that the fall of Adam involves so many nations with their infant children in eternal death without remedy unless that it so seemed fitting to God? Here the most loquacious tongues must be dumb [silent].

### ***God's omniscience and omnipotence***

The decree, I admit, is, dreadful; and yet **it is impossible to deny that God foreknew what the end of man was to be before He made him, and foreknew, because He had so ordained by His decree.** Should anyone here inveigh against the prescience of God, he does it rashly and unadvisedly. For why, I ask, should it be made a charge against the heavenly Judge, that He was not ignorant of what was to happen? Thus, if there is any just or plausible complaint, it must be directed against predestination. Nor ought it to seem absurd when I say, that **God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his posterity; but also at His own pleasure arranged it. For as it belongs to His wisdom [omniscience] to foreknow all future events, so it belongs to His power [omnipotence] to rule and govern them by His hand.**

This question, like others, is skillfully explained by Augustine: "Let us confess with the greatest benefit, what we believe with the greatest truth, that the God and Lord of all things who made all things very good, both foreknew that evil was to arise out of good, and knew that it belonged to His most omnipotent goodness to bring good out of evil, rather than not permit evil to be, and so ordained the life of angels and men as to show in it, first, what free-will could do; and, secondly, what the benefit of His grace and His righteous judgment could do" (August. Enchir. ad Laurent).

### ***The argument that God only permits but does not will the death of the wicked, refuted.***

8. Here they recur to the distinction between will and permission, the object being to prove that the wicked perish only by the permission, but not by the will of God. But why do we say that He permits, but just because He wills? Nor, indeed, is there any probability in the thing itself, namely, that man brought death upon himself merely by the permission, and not by the ordination of God; as if God had not determined what He wished the condition of the chief of His creatures to be.

**I will not hesitate, therefore, simply to confess with Augustine that the will of God is necessity, and that everything is necessary which He has willed; just as those things will certainly happen which He has foreseen,** (August. De Genesis ad Lit., Lib. 6, cap. 15). Now, if in excuse of themselves and the ungodly, either the Pelagians, or Manichees, or Anabaptists, or Epicureans (for it is with these four sects we have to

discuss this matter), should object the necessity by which they are constrained, in consequence of the divine predestination, they do nothing that is relevant to the cause. For if predestination is nothing else than a dispensation of divine justice, secret indeed, but unblamable, because it is certain that those predestinated to that condition were not unworthy of it, it is equally certain, that the destruction consequent upon predestination is also most just. Moreover, though their perdition depends on the predestination of God, the cause and matter of it is in themselves.

The first man fell because the Lord deemed it fitting that he should: why He deemed it fitting, we do not know. It is certain, however, that it was just, because He saw that His own glory would thereby be displayed.

When you hear the glory of God mentioned, understand that His justice is included. For that which deserves praise must be just. **Man therefore falls, divine providence so ordaining, but he falls by his own fault.** The Lord had a little before declared that all the things which He had made were very good (Genesis 1:31). From where came then the depravity of man, which made him revolt from God? Lest it should be supposed that it was from His creation, God had expressly approved what proceeded from Himself. Therefore man's own wickedness corrupted the pure nature which he had received from God, and his ruin brought with it the destruction of all his posterity.

Wherefore, let us in the corruption of human nature contemplate the evident cause of condemnation (a cause which comes more closely home to us), rather than inquire into a cause hidden and almost incomprehensible in the predestination of God. Nor let us decline to submit our judgment to the boundless wisdom of God, so far as to confess its insufficiency to comprehend many of His secrets. **Ignorance of things which we are not able, or which it is not lawful to know, is learning, while the desire to know them is a species of madness.**

### ***God's sovereignty and man's responsibility***

9. Someone, perhaps, will say, that I have not yet stated enough to refute this blasphemous excuse. I confess that it is impossible to prevent impiety from murmuring and objecting; but I think I have said enough not only to remove the ground, but also the pretext for throwing blame upon God. The reprobate would excuse their sins by alleging that they are unable to escape the necessity of sinning, especially because a necessity of this nature is laid upon them by the ordination of God. We deny that they can thus be validly excused, since the ordination of God, by which they complain that they are doomed to destruction, is consistent with equity—an equity, indeed, unknown to us, but most certain. Hence we conclude, that every evil which they bear is inflicted by the most just judgment of God.

Next we have shown that they act preposterously when, in seeking the origin of their condemnation, they turn their view to the hidden recesses of the divine counsel, and wink at the corruption of nature, which is the true source. They cannot impute this corruption to God, because He bears testimony to the goodness of His creation. **For though, by the eternal providence of God, man was formed for the calamity under which he lies, he took the matter of it from himself, not from God, since the only cause of his destruction was his degenerating from the purity of his creation into a state of vice and impurity.**

10. There is a third absurdity by which the adversaries of predestination defame it. As we ascribe it entirely to the counsel of the divine will, that those whom God adopts as the

heirs of His kingdom are exempted from universal destruction, they infer that He is an acceptor of persons; but this Scripture uniformly denies: and, therefore Scripture is either at variance with itself, or respect is had to merit in election.

First, the sense in which Scripture declares that **God is not an acceptor [respector] of persons**, is different from that which they suppose: since the term person does not mean man, but those things which when conspicuous in a man, either procure favor, grace, and dignity, or, on the contrary, produce hatred, contempt, and disgrace. Among, these are, on the one hand, riches, wealth, power, rank, office, country, beauty, etc.; and, on the other hand, poverty, want [lack], mean birth [e.g., low social class], sordidness [wretchedness], contempt, and the like. Thus Peter and Paul say, that the Lord is no acceptor of persons, because He makes no distinction between the Jew and the Greek; does not make the mere circumstance of country the ground for rejecting, one or embracing the other (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:10, Galatians 3:28). Thus James also uses the same words, when he would declare that God has no respect to riches in His judgment (James 2:5). Paul also says in another passage, that in judging God has no respect to slavery or freedom (Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25).

There is nothing inconsistent with this when we say, that God, according to the good pleasure of His will, without any regard to merit, elects those whom He chooses for sons, while He rejects and reprobates others. For fuller satisfaction the matter may be thus explained (see August. Epist. 115, et ad Bonif., Lib. 2, cap. 7).

It is asked, how it happens that of two, between whom there is no difference of merit, God in His election adopts the one and passes by the other? I, in my turn, ask, Is there anything in him who is adopted to incline God towards him? If it must be confessed that there is nothing, it will follow, that **God does not look to the man, but is influenced entirely by His own goodness to do him good. Therefore, when God elects one and rejects another, it is owing not to any respect to the individual, but entirely to His own mercy which is free to display and exert itself when and where He pleases.** For we have elsewhere seen, that in order to humble the pride of the flesh “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26); so far is God in the exercise of His favor from showing any respect to persons.

11. Wherefore, it is false and most wicked to charge God with dispensing justice unequally, because in this predestination He does not observe the same course towards all. If (they say) He finds all guilty, let Him punish all alike; if He finds them innocent, let Him relieve all from the severity of judgment. But they plead with God as if He were either interdicted [prohibited] from showing mercy, or were obliged, if He show mercy, entirely to renounce judgment. What is it that they demand? That if all are guilty all shall receive the same punishment. We admit that the guilt is common, but we say, that God in mercy succors some. Let Him (they say) succor all. We object, that it is right for Him to show by punishing that He is a just judge. When they cannot tolerate this, what else are they attempting than to deprive God of the power of showing mercy; or, at least, to allow it to Him only on the condition of altogether renouncing judgment?

Here the words of Augustine most admirably apply: “Since in the first man the whole human race fell under condemnation, those vessels which are made of it unto honor, are not vessels of self-righteousness, but of divine mercy. When other vessels are made unto dishonor, it must be imputed not to injustice, but to judgment” (August. Epist. 106, De Praedest. et Gratia; De Bone Persever., cap. 12).

Since God inflicts due punishment on those whom He reprobates, and bestows unmerited favor on those whom He calls, He is free from every accusation; just as it belongs to the creditor to forgive the debt to one, and exact it of another. The Lord therefore may show favor to whom He will, because He is merciful; not show it to all, because He is a just judge. In giving to some what they do not merit, He shows His free favor; in not giving to all, He declares what all deserve. For when Paul says, "God has concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all," it ought also to be added, that He is debtor to none; for "who has first given to Him and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" (Romans 11:32-35).

12. Another argument which they employ to overthrow predestination is that if it stand, all care and study of well doing must cease. For what man can hear (say they) that life and death are fixed by an eternal and immutable decree of God, without immediately concluding that it is of no consequence how he acts, since no work of his can either hinder or further the predestination of God? Thus all will rush on, and like desperate men plunge headlong wherever lust inclines. And it is true that this is not altogether a fiction; for there are multitudes of a swinish nature who defile the doctrine of predestination by their profane blasphemies, and employ them as a cloak to evade all admonition and censure. "God knows what he has determined to do with regard to us: if He has decreed our salvation, He will bring us to it in His own time; if He has doomed us to death, it is vain for us to fight against it." But Scripture, while it enjoins us to think of this high mystery with much greater reverence and religion, gives very different instruction to the pious, and justly condemns the accursed license of the ungodly. For it does not remind us of predestination to increase our audacity, and tempt us to pry with impious presumption into the inscrutable counsels of God, but rather to humble and abase us, that we may tremble at His judgment, and learn to look up to His mercy. This is the mark at which believers will aim.

The grunt of these filthy swine is properly silenced by Paul. They say that they feel secure in vices because, if they are of the number of the elect, their vices will be no obstacle to the ultimate attainment of life. But Paul reminds us that the end for which we are elected is, "that we should be holy, and without blame before Him" (Ephesians 1:4). **If the end of election is holiness of life, it ought to arouse and stimulate us strenuously to aspire to it, instead of serving as a pretext for sloth.** How wide the difference between the two things, between ceasing from well-doing because election is sufficient for salvation, and its being the very end of election, that we should devote ourselves to the study of good works. Have done, then, with blasphemies which wickedly invert the whole order of election.

When they extend their blasphemies farther, and say that he who is reprobated by God will lose his pains if he studies to approve himself to Him by innocence and probity [uprightness] of life, they are convicted of the most impudent falsehood. For from where can any such study arise but from election? As all who are of the number of the reprobate are vessels formed unto dishonor, so they cease not by their perpetual crimes to provoke the anger of God against them, and give evident signs of the judgment which God has already passed upon them; so far is it from being true that they vainly contend against it.

### ***Evangelism and Predestination***

13. Another impudent and malicious calumny against this doctrine is, that it destroys all exhortations to a pious life. The great odium to which Augustine was at one time



subjected on this heading he wiped away in his treatise *De Correptione et Gratia*, to Valentinus, a perusal of which will easily satisfy the pious and docile. Here, however, I may touch on a few points, which will, I hope, be sufficient for those who are honest and not contentious.

***Are those who believe in predestination the “frozen chosen”? Does this doctrine impede or rather promote evangelism?***

We have already seen how plainly and audibly **Paul** preaches the doctrine of free election: is he, therefore, cold in admonishing and exhorting? Let those good zealots compare his vehemence with theirs and they will find that they are ice, while he is all fervor. And surely every doubt on this subject should be removed by the principles which he lays down, that God has not called us to uncleanness; that everyone should possess his vessel in honor; that we are the workmanship of God, “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them” (1 Thessalonians 4:4, 7; Ephesians 2:10). In one word, those who have any tolerable acquaintance with the writings of Paul will understand, without a long demonstration, how well he reconciles the two things which those men pretend to be contradictory to each other.

**Christ** commands us to believe in Him, and yet there is nothing false or contrary to this command in the statement which He afterwards makes: “No man can come unto me, except it were given him of My Father” (John 6:65). Let preaching then have its free course, that it may lead men to faith, and dispose them to persevere with uninterrupted progress. Nor, at the same time, let there be any obstacle to the knowledge of predestination, so that those who obey may not plume themselves on anything of their own, but glory only in the Lord. It is not without cause our Savior says, “Who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 13:9). Therefore, while we exhort and preach, those who have ears willingly obey: in those again, who have no ears is fulfilled what is written: “Hear ye indeed, but do not understand” (Isaiah 6:9).

“But why (says Augustine) have some ears, and others not? Who has known the mind of the Lord? Are we, therefore, to deny what is plain because we cannot comprehend what is hid?” This is a faithful quotation from Augustine; but because his words will perhaps have more authority than mine, let us adduce the following passage from his treatise, *De dono perseverantiae*, c. 15.

Should some on hearing this turn to indolence and sloth, and leaving off all exertion, rush headlong into lust, are we, therefore to suppose that what has been said of the foreknowledge of God is not true? If God foreknew that they would be good, will they not be good, however great their present wickedness? and if God foreknew that they would be wicked, will they not be wicked, how great soever the goodness now seen in them? For reasons of this description, must the truth which has been stated on the subject of divine foreknowledge be denied or not mentioned? and more especially when, if it is not stated, other errors will arise?

In the sixteenth chapter he [Augustine] says,

“The reason for not mentioning the truth is one thing, the necessity for telling the truth is another. It were tedious to inquire into all the reasons for silence. One, however, is, lest those who understand not become worse, while we are desirous to make those who understand better informed. Now such persons, when we say

anything of this kind, do not indeed become better informed, but neither do they become worse. But when the truth is of such a nature, that he who cannot comprehend it becomes worse by our telling it, and he who can comprehend it becomes worse by our not telling it, what do you think we ought to do? Are we not to tell the truth, that he who can comprehend may comprehend, rather than not tell it, and thereby not only prevent both from comprehending, but also make the more intelligent of the two to become worse, whereas if he heard and comprehended others might learn through him? And we are unwilling to say what, on the testimony of Scripture, it is lawful to say. For we fear lest, when we speak, he who cannot comprehend may be offended; but we have no fear lest while we are silent, he who can comprehend the truth be involved in falsehood.

In chapter twenty, glancing again at the same view, Augustine more clearly confirms it.

Wherefore, if the apostles and teachers of the Church who came after them did both; if they discoursed piously of the eternal election of God, and at the same time kept believers under the discipline of a pious life, how can those men of our day, when shut up by the invincible force of truth, think they are right in saying, that what is said of predestination, though it is true, must not be preached to the people? No, it ought indeed to be preached, that whoever has ears to hear may hear. And who has ears if he has not received them from Him who has promised to give them? Certainly, let him who receives not, reject. Let him who receives, take and drink, drink and live. For as piety is to be preached, that God may be properly worshipped; so predestination also is to be preached, that he who has ears to hear may, in regard to divine grace, glory not in himself, but in God.

14. And yet as that holy man [Augustine] had a singular desire to edify, he so regulates his method of teaching as carefully, and as far as in him lay, to avoid giving offense. For he reminds us, that those things which are truly should also be fitly spoken. Were any one to address the people thus: If you do not believe, the reason is, because God has already doomed you to destruction: he would not only encourage sloth, but also give countenance to wickedness. Were any one to give utterance to the sentiment in the future tense, and say, that those who hear will not believe because they are reprobates, it were imprecation rather than doctrine. Wherefore, Augustine not undeservedly orders such, as senseless teachers or ministers and ill-omened prophets, to retire from the Church. He, indeed, elsewhere truly contends that "a man profits by correction only when He who causes those whom He pleases to profit without correction, pities and assists. But why is it thus with some, and differently with others? Far be it from us to say that it belongs to the clay and not to the potter to decide."

Augustine afterwards says, "When men by correction either come or return to the way of righteousness, who is it that works salvation in their hearts but He who gives the increase, whoever it be that plants and waters? **When He is pleased to save, there is no free-will in man to resist.** [This is the doctrine of irresistible grace.] Wherefore, it cannot be doubted that **the will of God** (who has done whatever He has pleased in heaven and in earth, and who has even done things which are to be) **cannot be resisted by the human will, or prevented from doing what He pleases, since with the very wills of men He does so.**" Again, "When He would bring men to Himself, does He bind them with corporeal fetters? He acts inwardly, inwardly holds, inwardly moves their hearts, and draws them by the will, which He has wrought [created] in them."

What Augustine immediately adds must not be omitted: “because we do not know who belongs to the number of the predestinated, or does not belong, our desire ought to be that all may be saved; and hence every person we meet, we will desire to be with us a partaker of peace. But our peace will rest upon the sons of peace. Wherefore, on our part, let correction be used as a harsh yet salutary [health-imparting] medicine for all, that they may neither perish, nor destroy others. To God it will belong to make it available to those whom He has foreknown and predestinated.”

***Election Confirmed by the Calling of God. The Reprobate Bring on Themselves the Righteous Destruction to Which They are Doomed.***

13. Why, then, while bestowing grace on the one, does He [God] pass by the other? In regard to the former, Luke gives the reason, Because they “were ordained to eternal life” (Acts 13:48). What, then, shall we think of the latter, but that they are vessels of wrath unto dishonor? Wherefore, let us not decline to say with Augustine, “God could change the will of the wicked into good, because He is omnipotent. Clearly He could. Why, then, does He not do it? Because He is unwilling. Why He is unwilling remains with Himself” (August. *De Genesi ad litteram* lib. 2).

We should not attempt to be wise above what is proper, and it is much better to take Augustine’s explanation, than to quibble with Chrysostom, “that He draws him who is willing and stretching forth his hand” (Chrysostom, *Hom. De Convers. Pauli*), lest the difference should seem to lie in the judgment of God, and not in the mere will of man. So far is it, indeed, from being placed in the mere will of man, that we may add, that even the pious, and those who fear God, need this special inspiration of the Spirit.

Lydia, a seller of purple, feared God, and yet it was necessary that her heart should be opened, that she might attend to the doctrine of Paul, and profit in it (Acts 16:14). This was not said of one woman only but to teach us that all progress in piety is the secret work of the Spirit.

Nor can it be questioned, that God sends His word to many whose blindness He is pleased to aggravate. For why does He order so many messages to be taken to Pharaoh? Was it because He hoped that He might be softened by the repetition? No, before He began He both knew and had foretold the result: “The Lord said unto Moses, When you go to return into Egypt see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, that he will not let the people go” (Exodus 4:21).

So when He raises up Ezekiel, He forewarns him, “I send you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me.” “Do not be afraid of their words.” “You dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not” (Ezekiel 2:3, 6; 12:2).

Thus He foretells to Jeremiah that the effect of his doctrine would be “to root out, and pull down, and to destroy” (Jeremiah 1:10).

But the prophecy of Isaiah presses still more closely; for he is thus commissioned by the Lord, “Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but do not understand, and see ye indeed but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed” (Isaiah 6:9,10).

Here He directs His voice to them, but it is that they may turn a deafer ear; He kindles a light, but it is that they may become more blind; He produces a doctrine, but it is that they may be more stupid; He employs a remedy, but it is that they may not be cured. And John, referring to this prophecy, declares that the Jews could not believe the doctrine of Christ, because this curse from God lay upon them.

It is also incontrovertible, that to those whom God is not pleased to illumine, He delivers His doctrine wrapt up in enigmas, so that they may not profit by it, but be given over to greater blindness. Hence our Savior declares that the parables in which He had spoken to the multitude He expounded to the Apostles only "because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matthew 13:11). What, you will ask, does our Lord mean, by teaching those by whom He is careful not to be understood? Consider where the fault lies, and then cease to ask. How obscure soever the word may be, there is always sufficient light in it to convince the consciences of the ungodly.

14. It now remains to see **why** the Lord acts in the manner in which it is plain that He does. If the answer be given, that it is because men deserve this by their impiety, wickedness, and ingratitude, it is indeed well and truly said; but still, because it does not yet appear what the cause of the difference is, why some are turned to obedience, and others remain obdurate [hardhearted] we must, in discussing it, pass to the passage from Moses, on which Paul has commented, namely, "Even for this same purpose have I raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth" (Romans 9:17).

The refusal of the reprobate to obey the word of God when manifested to them, will be properly ascribed to the malice and depravity of their hearts, provided it be at the same time added that they were adjudged to this depravity, because they were raised up by the just but inscrutable judgment of God, to show forth His glory by their condemnation.

In like manner, when it is said of the sons of Eli, that they would not listen to salutary [health-giving] admonitions "because the Lord would slay them" (1 Samuel 2:25), it is not denied that their stubbornness was the result of their own iniquity; but it is at the same time stated why they were left to their stubbornness, when the Lord might have softened their hearts: namely, because His immutable decree had once for all doomed them to destruction.

Hence the words of John, "Though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him; that the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled which he spoke, Lord, who has believed our report?" (John 12:37, 38); for though he does not exculpate [clear of guilt or blame] their perverseness, he is satisfied with the reason that the grace of God is insipid [dull / bland] to men, until the Holy Spirit gives it its savor.

And Christ, in quoting the prophecy of Isaiah, "They shall all be taught of God" (John 6:45), designs only to show that the Jews were reprobates and aliens from the Church, because they would not be taught: and gives no other reason than that the promise of God does not belong to them.

Confirmatory of this are the words of Paul, "Christ crucified" was "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23). For after mentioning the usual result wherever the gospel is preached, that it

exasperates some, and is despised by others, he says, that it is precious to them only who are called.

A little before he had given them the name of believers, but **he was unwilling to refuse the proper rank to divine grace, which precedes faith** [i.e., God's grace / the new birth / regeneration precedes man's faith]; or rather, he added the second term by way of correction, that those who had embraced the gospel might ascribe the merit of their faith to the calling of God. Thus, also, he shortly after shows that they were elected by God.

When the wicked hear these things, they complain that God abuses His inordinate power; to make cruel sport with the miseries of His creatures. But let us, who know that all men are liable on so many grounds to the judgment of God, that they cannot answer for one in a thousand of their transgressions (Job 9:3), confess that **the reprobate suffer nothing which is not accordant with the most perfect justice**. When unable clearly to ascertain the reason, let us not decline to be somewhat in ignorance in regard to the depths of the divine wisdom. . . .

17. But if it is so (you will say) little faith can be put in the Gospel promises, which, in testifying concerning the will of God, declare that He wills what is contrary to His inviolable decree.

Not at all; for however universal the promises of salvation may be, there is no discrepancy between them and the predestination of the reprobate, provided we attend to their effect. We know that the promises are effectual only when we receive them in faith, but, on the contrary, when faith is made void, the promise is of no effect.

If this is the nature of the promises, let us now see whether there be any inconsistency between the two things, namely, that God, by an eternal decree, fixed the number of those whom He is pleased to embrace in love, and on whom He is pleased to display His wrath, and that He offers salvation indiscriminately to all. [This is often called "the free offer of the gospel"—the gospel is to be preached to all people.]

I hold that they are perfectly consistent, for all that is meant by the promise is, just that **His mercy is offered to all who desire and implore it, and this none do, except those whom He has enlightened. Moreover, He enlightens those whom He has predestinated to salvation**. Thus the truth of the promises remains firm and unshaken, so that it cannot be said there is any disagreement between the eternal election of God and the testimony of His grace which He offers to believers.

But why does he mention all men? Namely that the consciences of the righteous may rest the more secure when they understand that there is no difference between sinners, provided they have faith, and that the ungodly may not be able to allege that they have not an asylum to which they may retake themselves from the bondage of sin, while they ungratefully reject the offer which is made to them. Therefore, **since by the Gospel the mercy of God is offered to both, it is faith, in other words, the illumination of God, which distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked**, the former feeling the efficacy of the Gospel, the latter obtaining no benefit from it. Illumination itself has eternal election for its rule. . . .