

## Chapter 12—Difficulties And Objections Sovereignty of God(A W Pink) 1

### Chapter 12—Difficulties And Objections

"Yet ye say, '*The way of the Lord is not equal.* Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal?'" [Eze 18:25]

A convenient point has been reached when we may now examine, more definitely, some of the difficulties encountered and the objections which might be advanced against what we have written in previous pages. The author deemed it better to reserve these for a separate consideration, rather than deal with them as he went along, requiring as that would have done the breaking of the course of thought and destroying the strict unity of each chapter, or else cumbering our pages with numerous and lengthy footnotes. That there *are* difficulties involved in an attempt to set forth the truth of God's sovereignty is readily acknowledged. The hardest thing of all, perhaps, is to maintain the *balance* of truth. It is largely a matter of *perspective*. That God is sovereign is explicitly declared in Scripture: that man is a responsible creature is also expressly affirmed in Holy Writ. To define the relationship of these two truths, to fix the dividing line betwixt them, to show exactly where they meet, to exhibit the perfect consistency of the one with the other, is the weightiest task of all. Many have openly declared that it is *impossible* for the finite mind to harmonize them. Others tell us it is not necessary or even wise to attempt it. But, as we have remarked in an earlier chapter, it seems to us more honouring to God to seek in his Word the solution to every problem. What is impossible to man is possible with God, and while we grant that the finite mind is limited in its reach, yet, we remember that the Scriptures are given to us that the man of God may be "*thoroughly* furnished," and if we approach their study in the spirit of humility and of expectancy, then, according unto our *faith* will it be unto us.

As remarked above, the hardest task in this connection is to preserve the balance of truth while insisting on *both* the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of the creature. To some of our readers it may appear that in pressing the sovereignty of God to the lengths we have, man is reduced to a mere puppet. Hence, to guard against this, they would *modify* their definitions and statements relating to God's sovereignty, and thus seek to blunt the keen edge of what is so offensive to the carnal mind. Others, while refusing to weigh the evidence that we have adduced in support of our assertions, may raise objections which to their minds are sufficient to dispose of the whole subject. We would not waste time in the effort to refute objections made in a carping and contentious spirit, but we *are* desirous of meeting fairly the *difficulties* experienced by those who are anxious to obtain a fuller knowledge of the truth. Not that we deem ourselves able to give a satisfactory and final answer to every question that might be asked. Like the reader, the writer knows but "in part" and sees through a glass "darkly." All that we can do is to examine these difficulties in the light we now have, in dependence upon the Spirit of God that we may follow on to know the Lord better.

We propose now to retrace our steps and pursue the same order of thought as that followed up to this point. As a part of our "*definition*" of God's sovereignty we affirmed: "To say that God is sovereign is to declare that he is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat his counsels, thwart his purpose, or resist his will...The sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, infinite." To put it now in its strongest form, we insist that God does *as* he pleases, *only* as he pleases, *always* as he pleases: that whatever takes place in time is but the outworking of that which he decreed in eternity. In proof of this assertion we appeal to the following scriptures—"But our God is in the heavens: he hath done *whatsoever* he hath pleased." [Ps 115:3] "For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, *and who shall disannul it?* and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" [Isa 14:27] "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and *none* can stay his hand or say unto him, What doest thou?" [Da 4:35] "For of him, and through him, and to him, *are all things:* to whom be glory for ever. Amen." [Ro 11:36]

The above declarations are so plain and positive that any comments of ours upon them would simply be darkening counsel by words without knowledge. Such express statements as those just quoted, are so sweeping and so dogmatic that all controversy concerning the subject of which they treat ought for ever

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resorted to so as to neutralize their force. For example, it has been asked, If what we see in the world today is but the outworking of God's eternal purpose, if God's counsel is NOW being accomplished, then why did our Lord teach his disciples to pray, "Thy will *be done on earth* as it is in heaven?" Is it not a clear implication from these words that God's will is *not* now being done on earth? The answer is very simple. The emphatic word in the above clause is "as." God's will *is* being done on earth today, if it is not, then our earth is not subject to God's rule, and if it is not subject to his rule then he is not, as Scripture proclaims him to be, "The Lord of all the earth." <sup>[Jos 3:13]</sup> But God's will is not being done on earth as *it is* in heaven. *How* is God's will "done in heaven"?—Consciously and joyfully. How is it "done on earth"?—for the most part, unconsciously and sullenly. In heaven the angels perform the bidding of their creator intelligently and gladly, but on earth the unsaved among men accomplish his will blindly and in ignorance. As we have said in earlier pages, when Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus and when Pilate sentenced him to be crucified, they had no conscious intention of fulfilling God's decrees yet, nevertheless, unknown to themselves they *did* do so!

But again. It has been objected: If everything that happens on earth is the fulfilling of the Almighty's pleasure, if God has foreordained—before the foundation of the world—everything which comes to pass in human history, then why do we read in Ge 6:6 "It *repented* the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it *grieved* him at his heart?" Does not this language intimate that the antediluvians had followed a course which their maker had not marked out for them, and that in view of the fact they had "corrupted" their way upon the earth, the Lord *regretted* that he had ever brought such a creature into existence? Ere drawing such a conclusion let us note what is *involved* in such an inference. If the words "It repented the Lord that he had made man" are regarded in an *absolute* sense, then God's *omniscience* would be denied, for in such a case the course followed by man must have been *un* foreseen by God in the day that he created him. Therefore it must be evident to every reverent soul that this language bears some other meaning. We submit that the words, "It *repented* the Lord" is an *accommodation* to our finite intelligence, and in saying this we are not seeking to escape a difficulty or *cut* a knot, but are advancing an interpretation which we shall seek to show is in perfect accord with the general trend of Scripture.

The Word of God is addressed to *men*, and therefore it speaks the language of men. Because we cannot rise to God's level he, in grace, comes down to ours and converses with us in our own speech. The apostle Paul tells us of how he was "caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not possible (margin) to utter." <sup>[2Co 12:4]</sup> Those on earth could not understand the vernacular of heaven. The finite cannot comprehend the infinite, hence the Almighty deigns to couch his revelation in terms we may understand. It is for this reason the Bible contains many anthropomorphisms—i.e., representations of God in the form of man. God is Spirit, yet the Scriptures speak of him as having eyes, ears, nostrils, breath, hands etc., which is surely an accommodation of terms brought down to the level of human comprehension.

Again; we read in Ge 18:20,21 "And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, *and see whether they have done* altogether according to the cry of it, which is come up unto me; and if not, I will know." Now, manifestly, this is an anthropologism—God, speaking in human language. God *knew* the conditions which prevailed in Sodom, and his eyes had witnessed its fearful sins, yet he is pleased to use terms here that are taken from our own vocabulary.

Again; in Ge 22:12 we read, "And he (God) said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for *now* I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." Here again, God is speaking in the language of men, for *he* "knew" *before* he tested Abram exactly how the patriarch would act. So too the expression used *of God* so often in Jeremiah, <sup>[Jer 7:13 etc.]</sup> of him "rising up early," is manifestly an accommodation of terms.

Once more: in the parable of the vineyard Christ himself represents its owner as saying, "Then said the Lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved Son: *it may be* they will reverence him when they see him," <sup>[Lu 20:13]</sup> and yet, it is certain that God knew perfectly well that the "husbandmen" of

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his own Word had declared!

In the same way we understand the words in Ge 6:6 —"It *repented* the Lord that he had made man on the earth"—as an accommodation of terms to human comprehension. This verse does not teach that God was confronted with an unforeseen contingency, and therefore *regretted* that he had made man, but it expresses the *abhorrence* of a holy God at the awful wickedness and corruption into which man had fallen. Should there be any doubt remaining in the minds of our readers as to the legitimacy and soundness of our interpretation, a direct appeal to Scripture should instantly and entirely remove it—"The Strength of Israel (a divine title) will not lie nor repent: *for he is not a man, that he should repent!*" (Isa 15:25) "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, *with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning!*" (Jas 1:17)

Careful attention to what we have said above will throw light on numerous other passages which, if we ignore their *figurative* character and fail to note that God *applies to himself* human modes of expression, will be obscure and perplexing. Having commented at such length upon Ge 6:6 there will be no need to give such a detailed exposition of other passages which belong to the same class, yet, for the benefit of those of our readers who may be anxious for us to examine several other scriptures, we turn to one or two more.

One scripture which we often find cited in order to overthrow the teaching advanced in this book is our Lord's lament over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, *how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*" (Mt 23:37) The question is asked, Do not these words show that the Saviour *acknowledged the defeat* of his mission, that as a people the Jews resisted all his gracious overtures toward them? In replying to this question, it should first be pointed out that our Lord is here referring not so much to his *own* mission, as he is upbraiding the Jews for having *in all ages* rejected his grace—this is clear from his reference to the "prophets." The Old Testament bears full witness of how graciously and patiently Jehovah dealt with his people, and with what extreme obstinacy, from first to last, they refused to be "gathered" unto him, and how in the end he (temporarily) abandoned them to follow their own devices, yet, as the same Scriptures declare, the counsel of God *was not frustrated* by their wickedness, for it had been foretold (and therefore, decreed) by him—see, for example, 1Ki 8:33.

Mt 23:37 may well be compared with Isa 65:2 where the Lord says, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts." But, it may be asked, Did God seek to do that which was in opposition to his own eternal purpose? In words borrowed from Calvin we reply, "Though to our apprehension the will of God is manifold and various, yet he does not in himself will things at variance with each other, but astonishes our faculties with his various and *"manifold"* wisdom, according to the expression of Paul, till we shall be enabled to understand that he mysteriously wills what now seems contrary to his will." As a further illustration of the same principle we would refer the reader to Isa 5:1-4 "Now will I sing to my well Beloved a song of my Beloved touching his vineyard. My well Beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and *he looked that it should bring forth grapes,* and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. *What could have been done more* to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Is it not plain from this language that God reckoned himself to have done enough for Israel to warrant an expectation—speaking after the manner of men—of better returns? Yet, is it not equally evident when Jehovah says here "He looked that it should bring forth grapes" that he is accommodating himself to a form of finite expression? And, so also when he says "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" we need to take note that in the previous enumeration of what he *had* done—the "fencing" etc.—He refers *only* to *external* privileges, means, and opportunities, which had been bestowed upon Israel, for, of course, he *could* even then have taken away from them their stony

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Perhaps we should link up with Christ's lament over Jerusalem in Mt 23:37, his tears over the city, recorded in Lu 19:41 "He beheld the city, and wept over it." In the verses which immediately follow, we learn *what* it was that occasioned his tears: "Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side." It was the prospect of the fearful judgment which Christ knew was impending. But did those tears make manifest a disappointed God? Nay, verily. Instead, they displayed a perfect man. The Man Christ Jesus was no emotionless stoic, but one "filled with compassion." Those tears expressed the sinless sympathies of his real and pure humanity. Had he *not* "wept," he had been less than human. Those "tears" were one of many proofs that "in *all* things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren." (*Heb 2:17*)

In chapter one we have affirmed that God is sovereign in the exercise of his *love*, and in saying this we are fully aware that many will strongly resent the statement and that, furthermore, what we have now to say will probably meet with more criticism than anything else advanced in this book. Nevertheless, we must be true to our convictions of what we believe to be the teaching of Holy Scripture, and we can only ask our readers to examine diligently in the light of God's Word what we here submit to their attention.

One of the most popular beliefs of the day is that God loves everybody, and the very fact that it is so *popular* with all classes ought to be enough to arouse the suspicions of those who are subject to the Word of Truth. God's Love toward *all* his creatures is the fundamental and favourite tenet of Universalists, Unitarians, Theosophists, Christian Scientists, Spiritualists, Russellites, etc. No matter how a man may live—in open defiance of heaven, with no concern whatever for his soul's eternal interests, still less for God's glory, dying, perhaps with an oath on his lips, —not withstanding, God loves him, we are told. So widely has this dogma been proclaimed, and so *comforting* is it to the heart which is at enmity with God, we have little hope of convincing many of their error. That God loves everybody, is, we may say, quite a *modern* belief. The writings of the church fathers, the Reformers or the Puritans will (we believe) be searched in vain for any such concept. Perhaps the late D. L. Moody—captivated by Drummond's "The Greatest Thing in the World"—did more than anyone else last century to popularize this concept.

It has been customary to say God loves the sinner, though he hates his sin. <sup>(a)</sup> But that is a meaningless distinction. What is there in a sinner but sin? Is it not true that his "*whole* head is sick," and his "*whole* heart faint," and that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is *no soundness* in him?" (*Isa 1:5,6*) Is it true that God *loves* the one who is *despising* and rejecting his blessed Son? God is Light as well as Love, and therefore his love must be a *holy* love. To tell the Christ rejecter that God loves him is to cauterise his conscience, as well as to afford him a sense of security in his sins. The fact is, that the love of God, is a truth for the saints only, and to present it to the enemies of God is to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. With the exception of Joh 3:16, not once in the four Gospels do we read of the Lord Jesus—the perfect Teacher telling sinners that God loved them! In the book of Acts, which records the evangelistic labours and messages of the apostles, God's love is never referred to at all! But, when we come to the Epistles, which are addressed to *the saints*, we have a full presentation of this precious truth—God's love *for his own*. Let us seek to *rightly* divide the Word of God and then we shall not be found taking truths which are addressed to believers and *mis* applying them to unbelievers. That which sinners need to have brought before them is, the ineffable holiness, the exacting righteousness, the inflexible justice and the terrible wrath of God. Risking the danger of being misunderstood, let us say—and we wish we could say it to every evangelist and preacher in the country—there is far too much presenting of Christ to sinners today (by those sound in the faith), and far too little showing sinners their *need* of Christ, i.e., their absolutely ruined and lost condition, their imminent and awful danger of suffering the wrath to come, the fearful guilt resting upon them in the sight of God—to present Christ to those who have never been shown their *need* of him, seems to us to be guilty of casting pearls before swine. <sup>(b)</sup>

If it be true that God loves every member of the human family then why did our Lord tell his disciples,

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be loved of my Father...If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him?" (Joh 14:21,23) Why say "he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father" if the Father loves *everybody*? The same limitation is found in Pr 8:17 "I love them that love me." Again; we read, "Thou hatest all *workers of iniquity*"—not merely the works of iniquity. Here, then, is a flat repudiation of present teaching that, God hates sin but loves the sinner; Scripture says, "Thou *hatest all workers of iniquity!*" (Ps 5:5) God is *angry* with the wicked every day. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of God*"—not "*shall abide,*" but even now—"abideth on him." (Ps 5:5 7:11 Joh 3:36) Can God "love" the one on whom his "wrath" abides? Again; is it not evident that the words "The love of God *which is in Christ Jesus*" (Ro 8:35) mark a limitation, both in the sphere and objects of his love? Again; is it not plain from the words "Jacob have I loved, *but Esau have I hated*" (Ro 9:13) that God does *not* love everybody? Again; it is written, "For *whom* the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth *every son* whom he receiveth." (Heb 12:6) Does not this verse teach that God's love is *restricted* to the members of his own family? If he loves all men without exception, then the distinction and limitation here mentioned is quite meaningless. Finally, we would ask, Is it conceivable that God will love the damned in the Lake of Fire? Yet, if he loves them now he will do so then, seeing that his love knows no change—he is "*without variableness or shadow of turning*"!

Turning now to Joh 3:16, it should be evident from the passages just quoted, that this verse will not bear the construction usually put upon it. "God so loved *the world*". Many suppose that this means, "The entire human race." But "the entire human race," includes all mankind from Adam till the close of the earth's history: it reaches backward as well as forward! Consider, then, the history of mankind *before* Christ was born. Unnumbered millions lived and died before the Saviour came to the earth, lived here "having no hope and without God in the world," and therefore passed out into an eternity of woe. If God "loved" *them*, where is the slightest proof thereof? Scripture declares, "Who (God) in times past (from the tower of Babel till after Pentecost) suffered *all nations* to walk in their own ways." (Ac 14:16) Scripture declares that, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, *God gave them over* to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." (Ro 1:28) To Israel God said, "You *only* have I known of all the families of the earth." (Am 3:2) In view of these plain passages, who will be so foolish as to insist that God in the past loved all mankind! The same applies with equal force to the future. Read through the book of Revelation, noting especially Re 8:1-19:21, where we have described the judgments which will yet be poured out from heaven on this earth. Read of the fearful woes, the frightful plagues, the vials of God's wrath, which shall be emptied on the wicked. Finally, read Re 20:11-15, the great white throne judgment, and see if you can discover there the slightest trace of *love*.

But the objector comes back to Joh 3:16 and says, "World *means world*". True, but we have shown that "the world" does not mean the whole human family. The fact is that "the world" is used in a *general* way. When the brethren of Christ said, "Shew thyself to *the world*", (Joh 7:4) did they mean show thyself to *all mankind*? When the Pharisees said, "Behold, *the world* is gone after him," (Joh 12:19) did they mean that "*all the human family*" were flocking after him? When the apostle wrote, "Your faith is spoken of throughout *the whole world*", (Ro 1:8) did he mean that the faith of the saints at Rome was the subject of conversation by every man, woman, and child on the earth? When Re 13:3 informs us that "*all the world* wondered after the beast," are we to understand that there will be no exceptions? What of the godly Jewish remnant, who will be slain (Re 20:4) rather than submit? These, and other passages which might be quoted, show that the term "the world" often has a *relative* rather than an *absolute* force.

Now the first thing to note in connection with Joh 3:16 is that our Lord was there speaking to Nicodemus—a man who believed that God's mercies were *confined* to his own nation. Christ there announced that God's love in giving his Son had a larger object in view, that it flowed beyond the boundary of Palestine, reaching out to "regions beyond." In other words, this was Christ's announcement that God had a purpose of grace toward Gentiles as well as Jews. "God so loved the world," then, signifies, God's love is *international* in its scope. But does this mean that God loves every individual among the Gentiles? Not necessarily, for as we have seen, the term "world" is general rather than specific, relative rather than absolute. The term "world" in itself is not conclusive. To ascertain *who* are the objects of God's love other passages where *his love* is mentioned must be consulted.

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be a world of the *godly*. It is the latter who are in view in the passages we shall now briefly consider. "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto *the world*". [*Joh 6:33*] Now mark it well, Christ did not say, "*offereth* life unto the world," but "giveth." What is the difference between the two terms? This: a thing which is "offered" may be *refused*, but a thing "given," necessarily implies its *acceptance*. If it is not *accepted*, it is *not* "given," it is simply proffered. Here, then, is a scripture that positively states Christ giveth life (spiritual, eternal life) "unto *the world*." Now he does not *give* eternal life to the "world of the ungodly" for they will not have it, they do not want it. Hence, we are *obliged* to understand the reference in Joh 6:33 as being to "the world of the godly," i.e., God's own people.

One more: in 2Co 5:19 we read, "To wit that God was in Christ, reconciling *the world* unto himself." What is meant by this is clearly defined in the words immediately following, "not imputing *their* trespasses unto them." Here again, "the world" *cannot* mean "the world of the ungodly," for *their* "trespasses" *are* "imputed" to them, as the judgment of the Great White Throne will yet show. But 2Co 5:19 plainly teaches there *is* a "world" which *are* "reconciled," reconciled unto God, because their trespasses are *not* reckoned to their account, having been borne by their substitute. Who then are they? Only one answer is fairly possible—the world of God's people!

In like manner, the "world" in Joh 3:16 must, in the final analysis, refer to the world of God's people. *Must* we say, for there is no other alternative *solution*. It cannot mean the whole human race, for one half of the race was already in hell when Christ came to earth. It is unfair to insist that it means every human being now living, for every other passage in the New Testament where God's *love* is mentioned *limits it to his own people*—search and see! The objects of God's love in Joh 3:16 are precisely the same, as the objects of Christ's love in Joh 13:1 "Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his time was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having *loved his own* which were in the world, *he loved them* unto the end." We may admit that our interpretation of Joh 3:16 is no novel one invented by us, but one almost uniformly given by the Reformers and Puritans, and many others since them. <sup>[c]</sup>

Coming now to chapter three—The Sovereignty of God in Salvation—innumerable are the questions which might be raised here. It is strange, yet it is true, that many who acknowledge the sovereign rule of God over material things, will cavil and quibble when we insist that God is also sovereign in the spiritual realm. But their quarrel is with God and not with us. We have given scripture in support of everything advanced in these pages, and if that will not satisfy our readers it is idle for us to seek to convince them. What we write now is designed for those who *do* bow to the authority of Holy Writ, and for their benefit we propose to examine several other scriptures which have purposely been held over for this chapter.

Perhaps the one passage which has presented the greatest difficulty to those who have seen that passage after passage in Holy Writ plainly teaches the election of a limited number unto salvation is 2Pe 3:9 "not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance".

The first thing to be said upon the above passage is that, like all other scripture, it must be understood and interpreted in the light of its context. What we have quoted in the preceding paragraph is only part of the verse, and the last part of it at that! Surely it must be allowed by all that the first half of the verse needs to be taken into consideration. In order to establish what these words are supposed by many to mean, viz., that the words "any" and "all" are to be received without any qualification, it *must* be shown that the *context* is referring to *the whole human race*! If this cannot be shown, if there is no *premise* to justify this, then the *conclusion* also must be unwarranted. Let us then ponder the first part of the verse.

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise." Note "promise" in the singular number, *not* "promises." *What* promise is in view? The promise of *salvation*? Where, in all Scripture, has God ever *promised* to save the whole human race Where indeed? No, the "promise" here referred to is *not* about *salvation*. What then is it? The context tells us.

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saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" [2Pe 3:3,4] The context then refers to God's promise *to send back his beloved Son*. But many long centuries have passed, and this promise has not yet been fulfilled. True, but long as the delay may seem to *us*, the interval is short in the reckoning of *God*. As the proof of this we are reminded, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." [2Pe 3:8] In God's reckoning of time, less than two days have yet passed since he promised to send back Christ.

But more, the delay in the Father sending back his beloved Son is not only due to no "slackness" on his part, but it is also occasioned by his "longsuffering." His longsuffering to whom? The verse we are now considering tells us: "but is longsuffering *to us-ward*". And whom are the "us-ward"?—the human race, or God's own people? In the light of the context this is *not* an open question upon which each of us is free to form an opinion. The Holy Spirit has defined it. The opening verse of the chapter says, "This second Epistle, *beloved*, I now write unto you." And, again, the verse immediately preceding declares, "But, *beloved*, be not ignorant of this one thing etc., ." [2Pe 3:8] The "us-ward" then are the "beloved" of God. They to whom this epistle is addressed are "them that have *obtained* (not "exercised," but "obtained" as God's sovereign *gift*) like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." [2Pe 1:11] Therefore we say there is no room for a doubt, a quibble or an argument—the "us-ward" are the elect of God.

Let us now quote the verse as a whole: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but, that all should come to repentance." Could anything be clearer? The "any" that God is not willing should perish, are the "us-ward" to whom God is "longsuffering," the "beloved" of the previous verses. 2Pe 3:9 means, then, that God will not send back his Son until "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." [Ro 11:25] God will not send back Christ till that "people" whom he is now "taking out of the Gentiles" [Ac 15:14] are gathered in. God will not send back his Son till the body of Christ is complete, and that will not be till the ones whom he has elected to be saved in this dispensation shall have been brought to him. Thank God for his "longsuffering to us-ward." Had Christ come back twenty years ago the writer had been left behind to perish, in his sins. But that *could not* be, so God graciously delayed the second coming. For the same reason he is still delaying his advent. His decreed purpose is that *all* his elect will come to repentance, and repent they *shall*. The present interval of grace will not end until the last of the "other sheep" of Joh 10:16 are safely folded, —*then* will Christ return.

In expounding *the Sovereignty of God the Spirit in Salvation* we have shown that his power is *irresistible*, that, by his gracious operations upon and within them, he "compels" God's elect to come to Christ. The sovereignty of the Holy Spirit is set forth not only in Joh 3:8 where we are told "The wind bloweth where it pleaseth...so is every one that is born of the Spirit," but is affirmed in other passages as well. In 1Co 12:11 we read, "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally *as he will*." And again; we read in Ac 16:6,7 —"Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were *forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia*. After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go in to Bithynia: *but the Spirit suffered them not*." Thus we see how the Holy Spirit interposed his imperial will in opposition to the determination of the apostles.

But, it is objected against the assertion that the will and power of the Holy Spirit are *irresistible* that there are two passages, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New, which appear to militate against such a conclusion. God said of old, "My Spirit shall not always *strive* with man," [Ge 6:3] and to the Jews Stephen declared, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do *always resist the Holy Spirit*: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" [Ac 7:51,52] If then the Jews resisted the Holy Spirit, how can we say his power is *irresistible*? The answer is found in Ne 9:30 —"Many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy Spirit *in thy prophets*: yet would they not give ear." It was the *external* operations of the Spirit which Israel "resisted." It was the Spirit speaking by and through *the prophets* to which they "would not give ear." It was not anything which the Holy Spirit wrought *in them* that they "resisted," but the motives *presented to them* by the inspired messages of the prophets. Perhaps it will help the reader to catch our thought better if we

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done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee Chorazin!" etc. Our Lord here pronounces woe upon these cities for their failure to repent *because* of the "mighty works" (miracles) which he had done in their sight, and *not* because of any *internal* operations of his grace! The same is true of Ge 6:3. By comparing 1Pe 3:18-20 it will be seen that it was *by and through Noah* that God's Spirit "strove" with the antediluvians. The distinction noted above was ably summarized by Andrew Fuller (another writer long deceased from whom our moderns might learn much) thus: "There are *two kinds* of influences by which God works on the minds of men. First, 'That which is common, and which is effected by the ordinary use of motives presented to the mind for consideration'; Secondly, 'That which is special and supernatural'. The one contains nothing mysterious, any more than the influence of our words and actions on each other; the other is such a mystery that we know nothing of it but by its effects—The former *ought* to be effectual; the latter *is* so." The work of the Holy Spirit *upon* or *towards* men is always "resisted," by them; his work *within* is always successful. What saith the scriptures? This: "He which hath begun a good work IN you, *will* finish it." {*Php 1:6*}

The next question to be considered is: *Why preach the Gospel to every creature?* If God the Father has predestined only a limited number to be saved, if God the Son died to effect the salvation of only those given to him by the Father, and if God the Spirit is seeking to quicken none save God's elect, then what is the use of giving the Gospel to the world at large, and where is the propriety of telling sinners that "*Whosoever* believeth in Christ shall not perish but have everlasting life"?

First; it is of great importance that we should be clear upon the *nature* of the Gospel itself. The Gospel is God's good news concerning Christ and not concerning sinners, —"Paul a servant of Jesus Christ, called, to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God...*concerning his Son*, Jesus Christ our Lord." {*Ro 1:1,3*} God would have proclaimed far and wide the amazing fact that his own blessed Son "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." A universal testimony must be borne to the matchless worth of the person and work of Christ. Note the word "witness" in Mt 22:14. The Gospel is God's "witness" unto the perfections of his Son. Mark the words of the apostle: "For we are *unto God* a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, *and* in them that *perish!*" {*2Co 2:15*}

Concerning the character and contents of the Gospel the utmost confusion prevails today. The Gospel is not an "offer" to be bandied around by evangelistic peddlers. The Gospel is no mere *invitation*, but a *proclamation*, a proclamation concerning *Christ*; true, whether men believe it or no. No man is asked to believe that Christ died for him in particular. The Gospel, in brief, is this: Christ died for sinners, you are a sinner, believe in Christ, and you shall be saved. In the Gospel, God simply announces the terms upon which men may be saved (namely, repentance and faith) and, indiscriminately, all are commanded to fulfil them.

Second; repentance and remission of sins are to be preached in the name of the Lord Jesus "unto all the nations," {*Lu 24:47*} because God's elect are "scattered abroad" {*Joh 11:52*} *among* all nations, and it is by the preaching and hearing of the Gospel that they are called out of the world. The Gospel is the means which God uses in the saving of his own chosen ones. By nature God's elect are children of wrath "even as others;" they are lost sinners needing a Saviour, and apart from Christ there is no salvation for them. Hence, the Gospel must be believed by them *before* they can rejoice in the knowledge of sins forgiven. The Gospel is God's winnowing fan: it separates the chaff from the wheat, and gathers the latter into his garner.

Third; it is to be noted that God has other purposes in the preaching of the Gospel than the salvation of his own elect. The world exists for the elect's sake, yet others have the benefit of it. So the Word is preached for the elect's sake, yet others have the benefit of an external call. The sun shines, though blind men see it not. The rain falls upon rocky mountains and waste deserts, as well as on the fruitful valleys; so also, God suffers the Gospel to fall on the ears of the non-elect. The power of the Gospel is one of God's agencies for holding in check the wickedness of the world. Many who are never saved by it *are* reformed, their lusts are bridled, and they are restrained from becoming worse. Moreover, the preaching of the Gospel to the non-elect is made an admirable *test* of their characters. It exhibits the inveteracy of

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that "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." *[Joh 3:16]*

Finally; it is sufficient for us to know that we are *bidden* to preach the Gospel to every creature. It is not for us to reason about the *consistency* between this and the fact that "few are chosen." It is for us to obey. It is a simple matter to ask questions relating to the ways of God which no finite mind can fully fathom. We, too, might turn and remind the objector that our Lord declared, "Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit *hath never forgiveness,*" *[Mr 3:28,29]* and there can be no doubt whatever but that certain of the Jews *were* guilty of this very sin, *[see Mt 12:24 etc.]* and hence their destruction was inevitable. Yet, notwithstanding, scarcely two months later, he commanded his disciples to preach the Gospel to *every* creature. When the objector can show us the consistency of these two things—the fact that certain of the Jews had committed the sin for which there is never forgiveness, and the fact that to *them* the Gospel was to be preached—we will undertake to furnish a more satisfactory solution than the one given above to the harmony between a *universal* proclamation of the Gospel and a *limitation* of its saving power to those only that God has predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Once more, we say, it is not for us to *reason about* the Gospel; it is our business to *preach* it. When God ordered Abraham to offer up his son as a burnt offering, he might have objected that this command was *inconsistent* with his promise "In *Isaac* shall thy seed be called." But instead of arguing he obeyed, and left God to harmonize his promise and his precept. Jeremiah might have argued that God had bade him do that which was altogether unreasonable when he said, "Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; *but they will not hearken* to thee; thou shalt also call unto them; *but they will not answer thee*" *[Jer 7:27]* but instead, the prophet obeyed. Ezekiel, too, might have complained that the Lord was asking of him a hard thing when he said, "Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. *But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee;* for they will not hearken unto me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard hearted." *[Eze 3:4-7]*

But, O my soul, if truth so bright  
Should dazzle and confound thy sight,  
Yet still his written Word obey,  
And wait the great decisive day.  
—Watts.

It has been well said, "The Gospel has lost none of its ancient power. It is, as much today as when it was first preached, 'the power of God unto salvation'. It needs no pity, no help, and no handmaid. It can overcome all obstacles, and break down all barriers. No human device need be tried to prepare the sinner to receive it, for if God has sent it no power can hinder it; and if he has not sent it, no power can make it effectual." (Dr. Bullinger).

This chapter might be extended indefinitely, but it is already too long, so a word or two more must suffice. A number of other questions will be dealt with in the pages yet to follow, and those that we fail to touch upon the reader must take to the Lord himself who has said, "If any of you lack wisdom, *let him ask of God,* that giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not." *[Jas 1:5]*

*[a]* Ro 5:8 is addressed to *saints*, and the "we" are the same ones as those spoken of in Ro 8:29,30.

*[b]* Concerning the rich young ruler of whom it is said Christ "*loved him,*" *[Mr 10:21]* we fully believe that he was one of God's elect, and was "saved" sometime after his interview with our Lord. Should it be said this is an arbitrary assumption and assertion which lacks anything in the Gospel record to substantiate it, we reply, It is written, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," and this man certainly *did* "come" to him. Compare the case of Nicodemus. He, too, came to Christ, yet there is nothing in Joh 3:1-21 which intimates he was a saved man when the interview closed; nevertheless, we know from his later life that *he* was not "cast out."

*[c]* For a further discussion of Joh 3:16 *[See Topic in Appendix C 21]*