

Conclusion

"Halleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." *[Re 19:6]*

In our Foreword to the second edition (1353) we acknowledge the need for *preserving the balance* of truth. Two things are beyond dispute: God is sovereign, man is responsible. In this book we have sought to expound the former; in our other works we have frequently pressed the latter. That there is real danger of over emphasising the one and ignoring the other, we readily admit; yea, history furnishes numerous examples of cases of each. To emphasise the sovereignty of God, without also maintaining the accountability of the creature tends to fatalism; to be so concerned in maintaining the responsibility of man, as to lose sight of the sovereignty of God, is to exalt the creature and dishonour the creator.

Almost all doctrinal error, is, really, truth perverted, truth wrongly divided, truth *disproportionately* held and taught. The fairest face on earth, with the most comely features, would soon become ugly and unsightly, if one member continued growing while the others remained undeveloped. Beauty is, primarily, a matter of proportion. Thus it is with the Word of God: its beauty and blessedness are best perceived when its manifold wisdom is exhibited in its true proportions. It is here that so many have failed in the past. A single phase of God's truth has so impressed this man or that, that he has concentrated his attention upon it, almost to the exclusion of everything else. Some portion of God's Word has been made a "pet doctrine," and often this has become the distinctive badge of some party. But it is the duty of each servant of God to "declare *all* the counsel of God." *[Ac 20:27]*

It is true that the degenerate days in which our lot is cast, when on every side man is exalted, and "superman" has become a common expression, there is real need for a *special* emphasis upon the glorious fact of God's supremacy. The more so where this is expressly denied. Yet even here much wisdom is required, lest our zeal should not be "according to knowledge." The words "meat in due season" should ever be before the servant of God. What is needed, primarily, by one congregation, may not be specifically needed by another. If called to labour where Arminian preachers have preceded, then the neglected truth of God's sovereignty should be expounded—though with caution and care, lest too much "strong meat" be given to "babes." The example of Christ in Joh 16:12 "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them *now*," must be borne in mind. On the other hand, if I am called to take charge of a distinctly Calvinistic pulpit, then the truth of human responsibility (in its many aspects) may be profitably set forth. What the preacher needs to give out is not what his people most *like* to hear, but what they most *need*, i.e. those aspects of truth they are least familiar with, or least exhibiting in their walk.

To carry into actual practice what we have inculcated above will, most probably, lay the preacher open to the charge of being a turncoat. But what matters that if he has his Master's approval? He is not called upon to be "consistent" with himself, nor with any rules drawn up by man; his business is to be consistent with *Holy Writ*. And in Scripture each part or aspect of truth is balanced by another aspect of truth. There are two sides to everything, even to the character of God, for he is "light" *[1Jo 1:5]* as well as "love," *[1Jo 4:8]* and therefore are we called upon to "Behold, therefore the goodness *and* severity of God." *[Ro 11:22]* To be all the time preaching on the one to the exclusion of the other, caricatures the divine character.

When the Son of God became incarnate he came here in "the form of a *servant*"; *[Php 2:6]* nevertheless, in the manger he was "Christ *the Lord*!" *[Lu 2:11]* All things are possible with God, *[Mt 19:26]* yet God "cannot lie." *[Tit 1:2]* Scripture says, "Bear ye one another's burdens," *[Ga 6:2]* yet the same chapter insists "every man shall bear his own burden." *[Ga 6:5]* We are enjoined to take "no thought for the morrow," *[Mt 6:34]* yet "if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." *[1Ti 5:8]* No sheep of Christ's can perish, *[Joh 10:28,29]* yet the Christian is bidden to make his "calling and election *sure*". *[2Pe 1:10]* And so we might go on multiplying illustrations. These things are not contradictions, but complementaries: the one "balances the other." Thus, the Scriptures set forth *both* the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. So too should every servant of God, and that, in their proper proportions.

But we return now to a few closing reflections upon our present theme. "And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, And said, O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, *so that none is able to withstand thee?*" (2Ch 20:5,6) Yes, the Lord *is* God, ruling over all the kingdoms of men, ruling in supreme majesty and might. Yet in our day, a day of boasted enlightenment and progress, this is denied on every hand. A materialistic science and an atheistic philosophy have bowed God out of his own world, and everything is regulated, forsooth, by (impersonal) laws of nature. So in human affairs: at best God is a far distant spectator, and a *helpless* one at that. God could not help the launching of the dreadful war, and though he longed to put a stop to it he was unable to do so—and this in the face of 1Ch 5:22 2Ch 24:24! Having endowed man with "free agency" God is obliged to let man make his own choice and go his own way, and he cannot interfere with him, or otherwise his moral responsibility would be destroyed. Such are the popular beliefs of the day. One is not surprised to find these sentiments emanating from German theologians, but how sad that they should be taught in many of our seminaries, echoed from many of our pulpits, and accepted by many of the rank and file of professing Christians.

One of the most flagrant sins of our age is that of irreverence—the failure to ascribe the glory which is due the august majesty of God. Men limit the power and activities of the Lord in their degrading concepts of his being and character. Originally, man was made in the image and likeness of God, but today we are asked to believe in a god made in the image and likeness of man. The creator is reduced to the level of the creature: his omniscience is called into question, his omnipotency is no longer believed in, and his absolute sovereignty is flatly denied. Men claim to be the architects of their own fortunes and the determiners of their own destiny. They know not that their lives are at the disposal of the Divine Despot. They know not they have no more power to thwart his secret decrees than a worm has to resist the tread of an elephant. They know not that "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom *ruleth over all.*" (Ps 103:19)

In the foregoing pages we have sought to repudiate such paganistic views as the above mentioned, and have endeavoured to show from Scripture that God *is* God, on the throne, and that so far from the recent war being an evidence that the helm had slipped out of his hand, it was a sure proof that he still lives and reigns, and is now bringing to pass that which he had foredetermined and foreannounced. (Mt 24:6-8 etc.) That the carnal mind is enmity against God, that the unregenerate man is a rebel against the divine government, that the sinner has no concern for the glory of his maker, and little or no respect for his revealed will, is freely granted. But, nevertheless, behind the scenes, God is ruling and over ruling, fulfilling his eternal purpose, not only in spite of but, also by means of, those who are his enemies.

How earnestly are the claims of man contended for against the claims of God! Has not man power and knowledge, but what of it? Has God no will, or power, or knowledge? Suppose man's will conflicts with God's—then what? Turn to the Scripture of Truth for answer. Men had a will on the plains of Shinar and determined to build a tower whose top should reach unto heaven, but what came of *their* purpose? Pharaoh had a will when he hardened his heart and refused to allow Jehovah's people to go and worship him in the wilderness, but what came of his rebellion? Balak had a will when he hired Balaam to come and curse the Hebrews, but of what avail was it? The Canaanites had a will when they determined to prevent Israel occupying the land of Canaan, but how far did they succeed? Saul had a will when he hurled his javelin at David, but it entered the wall instead! Jonah had a will when he refused to go and preach to the Ninevites, but what came of it? Nebuchadnezzar had a will when he thought to destroy the three Hebrew children, but God had a will too, and the fire did not harm them. Herod had a will when he sought to slay the child Jesus, and had there been no living, reigning God, his evil desire would have been effected; but in daring to pit his puny will against the irresistible will of the Almighty, his efforts came to nought. Yes, my reader, and you, too, had a will when you formed your plans *without* first seeking counsel of the Lord, therefore did he *overturn* them! "There are many devices in a man's heart: *nevertheless* the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." (Pr 19:21)

What a demonstration of the irresistible sovereignty of God is furnished by that wonderful statement

kingdom unto the Beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." The fulfilment of any single prophecy is but the sovereignty of God in operation. It is the demonstration that what he has decreed he is able also to perform. It is proof that none can withstand the execution of his counsel or prevent the accomplishment of his pleasure. It is the evidence that God *inclines* men to fulfil that which he has ordained and perform that which he has foredetermined. If God were not absolute Sovereign, then divine prophecy would be valueless, for in such case no guarantee would be left that what he had predicted *would* surely come to pass.

"For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will and, to agree, and give their kingdom unto the Beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." (Re 17:17) Even in that terrible time, when Satan has been cast down to the earth itself, (Re 12:9) when the Antichrist is reigning in full power, (Re 13:1-18) when the basest passions of men are let loose, (Re 6:4) even then God is supreme above all, working "through all", (Eph 4:6) controlling men's hearts and directing their counsels to the fulfilling of *his own* purpose. We cannot do better than quote here the excellent comments of our esteemed friend Mr. Waiter Scott upon this verse—"God works unseen, but not the less truly, in all the political changes of the day. The astute statesman, the clever diplomatist, is simply an agent in the Lord's hands. He knows it not. Self-will and motives of policy may influence to action, but God is steadily working toward an end—to exhibit the heavenly and earthly glories of his Son. Thus, instead of kings and statesmen thwarting God's purpose, they unconsciously forward it. God is not indifferent, but is behind the scenes of human action. The doings of the future ten kings in relation to Babylon and the Beast—the ecclesiastical and secular powers—are not only under the direct control of God, but all is done in fulfilment of his words."

Closely connected with Re 17:17 is that which is brought before us in Mic 4:11,12—"Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. *But they, know not the thoughts of the Lord,* neither understand they his counsel: for *he* shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor." Here is another instance which demonstrates God's absolute control of the nations, of his power to fulfil his secret counsel or decrees through and by them, and of his inclining men to perform his pleasure though it be performed blindly and unwittingly by them.

Once more. What a word was that of the Lord Jesus as he stood before Pilate! Who can depict the scene! There was the Roman official, and there also was the servant of Jehovah standing before him. Said Pilate, "Whence art thou?" And we read, "Jesus gave him no answer." Then said Pilate unto him, "Speakest thou not unto *me*? Knowest thou not *that I have power* to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" (Joh 19:10) Ah! that is what Pilate thought. That is what many another has thought. He was merely voicing the common conviction of the human heart—the heart which leaves *God* out of its reckoning. But hear the Lord Jesus as he *corrects* Pilate, and at the same time *repudiates* the proud boasting of men in general—"thou couldest have no power against me, *except it were given thee from above*". (Joh 19:11) How sweeping is this assertion! Man—even though he be a prominent official in the most influential empire of his day—has *no power* except that which is given him from above, no power, even, to do that which is evil, i.e., carry out *his own* evil designs, unless God empowers him so that *his* purpose may be forwarded. It was *God* who gave Pilate the power to sentence to death his well beloved Son! And how this rebukes the sophistries and reasonings of men, who argue that God does nothing more than *permit* evil! Why, go right back to the very first words spoken by the Lord God to man after the Fall, and hear him saying, "*I will put enmity* between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed!" (Ge 3:15) Bare permission of sin does not cover all the facts which are revealed in Scripture touching this mystery. As Calvin succinctly remarked, "But what reason shall we assign for his permitting it *but because it is his will*?"

At the close of chapter eleven we promised to give attention to one or two other Difficulties which were not examined at that time. To them we now turn. If God has not only predetermined the salvation of his own, but has also foreordained the good works which they are to walk in, (Eph 2:10) then what incentive remains for us to strive after practical godliness? If God has fixed the number of those who are to be saved, and the others are vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, then what encouragement have we to preach the Gospel to the lost? Let us take up these questions in the order of mention.

1. God's Sovereignty And The Believer's Growth In Grace.

If God has foreordained everything that comes to pass, of what avail is it for *us* to "exercise" ourselves "unto godliness?" (1Ti 4:7) If God has before ordained the good works in which we are to walk, (Eph 2:10) then why should *we* be careful to maintain good works? (Tit 3:8) This only raises once more the problem of human responsibility. Really, it should be enough for us to reply, God has *bidden* us do so. Nowhere does Scripture inculcate or encourage a spirit of fatalistic indifference. Contentment with our present attainments is expressly disallowed. The word to every believer is, "Press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Php 3:14) This was the apostle's aim, and it should be ours. Instead of hindering the development of Christian character, a proper apprehension and appreciation of God's sovereignty will forward it. Just as the sinner's *despair* of any help from himself is the first prerequisite of a sound conversion, so the loss of all confidence in himself is the first essential in the believer's growth in grace; and just as the sinner despairing of help from himself will cast him into the arms of sovereign mercy, so the Christian, conscious of his own frailty, will turn unto the Lord for power. When we are weak, we are strong: (2Co 12:10) that is to say, there must be *consciousness* of our weakness before we shall turn to the Lord for help. While the Christian allows the thought that he is sufficient in himself, while he imagines that by mere force of will he shall resist temptation, while he has any confidence in the flesh then, like Peter who *boasted* that though all forsook the Lord yet should not he, so we shall certainly fail and fall. Apart from Christ we can do *nothing*. (Joh 15:5) The promise of God is, "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might (of their own) he increaseth strength." (Isa 40:29)

The question now before us is of great practical importance, and we are deeply anxious to express ourselves clearly and simply. The secret of development of Christian character is the realization of our own *powerlessness*, acknowledged powerlessness, and the consequent turning unto the Lord for help. The plain fact is that of ourselves we are utterly unable to practice a single precept or obey a single command that is set before us in the Scriptures. For example: "Love your enemies"—but of ourselves we cannot do this, or make ourselves do it. "In nothing be anxious"—but who can avoid and prevent anxiety when things go wrong? "Awake to righteousness and sin not"—but who can help sinning? These are merely examples selected at random from scores of others. Does then God *mock* us by bidding us do what he knows we are *unable* to do? The answer of Augustine to this question is the best we have met with—"God gives commands we cannot perform, that we may know *what* we ought to request from him." A consciousness of our powerlessness should cast us upon him who has all power. here then is the place where a vision and view of God's sovereignty *helps*, for it reveals *his* sufficiency and shows us our *in* sufficiency.

2. God's Sovereignty And Christian Service.

If God has determined before the foundation of the world the precise number of those who shall be saved, then why should *we* concern ourselves about the eternal destiny of those with whom we come into contact? What place is left for *zeal* in Christian service? Will not the doctrine of God's sovereignty, and its corollary of predestination, *discourage* the Lord's servants from faithfulness in evangelism? No; instead of *dis* couraging his servants, a recognition of God's sovereignty is most *en* couraging to them. Here is one, for example, who is called upon to do the work of an evangelist, and he goes forth believing in the freedom of the will and in the sinner's own ability to come to Christ. He preaches the Gospel as faithfully and zealously as he knows how; but, he finds the vast majority of his hearers are utterly indifferent and have no heart at all for Christ. He discovers that men are, for the most part, thoroughly wrapped up in the things of the world, and that few have any concern about the world to come. He beseeches men to be reconciled to God, and pleads with them over their soul's salvation. But it is of no avail. He becomes thoroughly disheartened, and asks himself, What is the use of it all? Shall he quit, or had he better change his mission and message? If men will not respond to the Gospel, had he not better engage in that which is more popular and acceptable to the world? Why not occupy himself with humanitarian efforts, with social uplift work, with the purity campaign? Alas! that so many men who once preached the Gospel are now engaged in these activities instead.

God is not now seeking to convert the world, but that in this age he is "taking out of the Gentiles" a people for his name. [Ac 15:14] What then is God's corrective for his discouraged servant? This—a proper apprehension of *God's* plan for this Dispensation. Again: what is God's remedy for dejection at apparent failure in our labours? This—the assurance that *God's* purpose *cannot* fail, that God's plans *cannot* miscarry, that God's will *must* be done. *Our* labours are not intended to bring about that which *God* has not decreed. Once more: what is God's word of cheer for the one who is thoroughly disheartened at the lack of response to his appeals and the absence of fruit for his labours? This—that *we* are not responsible for results: that is *God's* side, and *God's* business. Paul may "plant," and Apollos may "water," but it is *God* who "gave the increase." [1Co 3:6] Our business is to obey Christ and preach the Gospel to every creature, to emphasise the "Whosoever believeth," and then to leave the sovereign operations of the Holy Spirit to apply the Word in quickening power to whom *he* wills, resting on the sure promise of Jehovah—"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: *it shall not return unto me void*, but it shall accomplish *that which I please* (it may not that which *we* please), and it shall prosper in the thing *whereto I sent it*". [Isa 55:10,11] Was it not this assurance that sustained the beloved apostle when he declared "Therefore (see context) I endure all things *for the elect's sake*"! [2Ti 2:16] Yea, is not this same lesson to be learned from the blessed example of the Lord Jesus! When we read that he said to the people, "Ye also have seen me, *and believe not*," he fell back upon the sovereign pleasure of the one who sent him, saying, "*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out*." [Joh 6:36,37] He knew that his labour would not be in vain. He knew God's Word would not return unto him "void." He knew that "God's elect" *would* come to him and believe on him. And this same assurance fills the soul of every servant who intelligently rests upon the blessed truth of God's sovereignty.

Ah fellow Christian worker, God has not sent us forth to "draw a bow at a venture." The success of the ministry which he has committed into our hands is not left contingent on the fickleness of the wills in those to whom we preach. How gloriously encouraging, how soul sustaining the assurance are those words of our Lord's, if we rest on them in simple faith: "And other sheep I have ("have" mark you, *not* will have; 'have," because given to him by the Father before the foundation of the world), which are not of this fold (i.e. the Jewish fold then existing): them also I *must* bring, and they *shall* hear my voice." [Joh 16:1-33] Not simply, they *ought* to hear my voice, not simply "they *may* hear my voice," not "they will do so *if* they are willing." There is no "if," no "perhaps," no uncertainty about it. "They *shall* hear my voice" is his own positive, unqualified, absolute promise. Here then, *faith* must rest! Continue your quest, dear friend, after the "other sheep" of Christ's. Be not discouraged because the "goats" heed not his voice as you preach the Gospel. Be faithful, be scriptural, be persevering, and Christ may use even you to be his mouthpiece in calling some of his lost sheep unto himself. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as *ye know* that your labour is *not in vain* in the Lord." [1Co 15:58]

It now remains for us to offer a few closing reflections and our happy task is finished.

God's sovereign election of certain ones to salvation is a MERCIFUL provision. The sufficient answer to all the wicked accusations that the doctrine of Predestination is cruel, horrible, and unjust, is that, *unless* God had chosen certain ones to salvation, *none* would have been saved, for "there is none that seeketh after God." [Ro 3:11] This is no mere inference of ours but the definite teaching of Holy Scripture. Attend closely to the words of the apostle in Ro 9:1-33, where this theme is fully discussed—"Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, *a remnant* shall be saved...And as Isaiah said before, *Except* the Lord of hosts *had left us a seed*, we had been as Sodom, *and been made like unto Gomorrah*". [Ro 9:27,29] The teaching of this passage is unmistakable: but for divine interference, Israel would have become as Sodom and Gomorrah. Had God left Israel alone, human depravity would have run its course to its own tragic end. But God left Israel a "remnant" or "seed." Of old the cities of the plain had been obliterated for their sin, and none was left to survive them; and so it would have been in Israel's case had not God "left" or spared a remnant. Thus it is with the human race: but for God's

say that God's sovereign election of certain ones to salvation is a *merciful* provision. And, be it noted, in choosing the ones he did, God did no *injustice* to the others who were passed by, for *none* had any *right* to salvation. Salvation is by *grace*, and the *exercise* of grace is a matter of pure *sovereignty*—God might save all or none, many or few, one or ten thousand, just as he saw best. Should it be replied, But surely it were "best" to save *all*. The answer would be: *We* are not capable of judging. *We* might have thought it "best" never to have created Satan, never to have allowed sin to enter the world, or having entered, to have brought the conflict between good and evil to an end long before now. Ah! God's ways are not ours, and his ways are "past finding out."

God foreordains everything which comes to pass. his sovereign rule extends throughout the entire universe and is over every creature. "For *of* him, and *through* him, and *to* him, are *all things*". [Ro 11:36] God initiates all things, regulates all things, and all things are working unto his eternal glory. "There is but one God, the Father, *of whom are all things*, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, *by whom are all things*, and we by him." [1Co 8:6] And again, "According to the purpose of him who *worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*". [Eph 1:11] Surely if anything could be ascribed to *chance* it is the *drawing of lots*, and yet the Word of God expressly declares, "The lot is cast into the lap; *but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord*" [Pr 16:33]

God's wisdom in the government of our world shall yet be completely vindicated before all created intelligences. God is no idle spectator, looking on from a distant world at the happenings on our earth, but is himself shaping everything to the ultimate promotion of his own glory. Even now he is working out his eternal purpose, not only in spite of human and Satanic opposition, but by means of them. How wicked and futile have been all efforts to resist his will shall one day be as fully evident as when of old he overthrew the rebellious Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea.

It has been well said, "The end and object of all is the glory of God. It is perfectly, divinely true, that 'God hath ordained for his own glory whatsoever comes to pass.' In order to guard this from all possibility of mistake, we have only to remember who is this God, and what the glory that he seeks. It is he who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, —of him in whom divine love came seeking *not* her own, among us as 'One that serveth.' It is he who, sufficient in himself, can receive no real accession of glory from his creatures, but from whom—'Love', as he is 'Light', —cometh down every good and every perfect gift, in whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning. Of his own alone can his creatures give to him."

"The glory of such a one is found in the display of his own goodness, righteousness, holiness, truth; in manifesting himself as in Christ he has manifested himself and will forever. The glory of this God is what of necessity *all things must serve*—adversaries and evil as well as all else. *He has ordained it*; his power will insure it; and when all apparent clouds and obstructions are removed, then shall he rest—'rest in his love' forever, although eternity only will suffice for the apprehension of the revelation. '*God shall be all in all*' (italics ours throughout this paragraph) gives in six words the ineffable result" (F.W. Grant on "Atonement").

That what we have written gives but an incomplete and imperfect presentation of this most important subject we must sorrowfully confess. Nevertheless, if it results in a clearer apprehension of the majesty of God and his sovereign mercy we shall be amply repaid for our labours. If the reader *has* received blessing from the perusal of these pages, let him not fail to return thanks to the Giver of every good and every perfect gift, ascribing *all* praise to his inimitable and sovereign grace.

The Lord, our God, is clothed with might,
The winds and waves obey his will;
He speaks, and in the shining height
The sun and rolling worlds stand still.

Rebel ye waves, and o'er the land

The Lord hath spoken his command
That breaks your rage upon the shore.

Ye winds of night, your force combine—
Without his holy high behest
You shall not in a mountain pine
Disturb the little swallow's nest.

His voice sublime is heard afar;
In distant peals it fades and dies;
He binds the cyclone to his car
And sweeps the howling murky skies.

Great God! how infinite art thou,
What weak and worthless worms are we,
Let all the race of creatures bow
And seek salvation now from thee.

Eternity, with all its years
Stands ever present to thy view,
To thee there is nothing old appears Great God!
There can be nothing new.

Our lives through varied scenes are drawn,
And vexed with mean and trifling cares;
While thine eternal thought moves on
Thy fixed and undisturbed affairs.

"Halleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth". (Re 19:6)