

## Chapter III.

### Of God's Eternal Decree

SECTION I.—God from all eternity did by the most and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

SECTION II.—Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions; yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, as that which would come to pass, upon such conditions.

#### EXPOSITION

By the decree of God is meant his purpose or determination with respect to future things; or, more fully, his determinate counsel, whereby, from all eternity, he foreordained whatever he should do, or would permit to be done, in time.

This subject is one of the most abstruse and intricate in theology, and it has been the fruitful source of a variety of controversies in the Christian Church. But whatever diversity of opinion may obtain respecting the details of the doctrine, “no man will deny that there are divine decrees, who believes that God is an intelligent being, and considers what this character implies. An intelligent being is one who knows and judges, who purposes ends and devises means, who acts from design, conceives a plan, and then proceeds to execute it. Fortune was worshipped as a goddess for the ancient heathens, and was represented as blind, to signify that she was guided by no fixed rule, and distributed her favours at random. Surely no person of common sense, not to say piety, will impute procedure so irrational to the Lord of universal nature. As he knew all things which his power could accomplish, there were, undoubtedly, reasons which determined him to do one thing, and not to do another; and his choice, which was founded upon those reasons, was his decree.”

That God must have decreed all future things is a conclusion which necessarily flows from his foreknowledge, independence, and immutability. “The foreknowledge of God will necessarily infer a decree, for God could not foreknow that things would be, unless he had decreed they should be; and that because things would not be future, unless he had decreed they should be.” If God be an independent being, all creatures must have an entire dependence upon him; but this dependence proves undeniably that all their acts must be regulated by his sovereign will. If God be of one mind, which none can

change, he must have unalterably fixed everything in his purpose which he effects in his providence.

This doctrine is plainly revealed in the Scriptures. They speak of God's foreknowledge, his purpose, his will, the determinate counsel of his will, and his predestination. "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate."—Rom. viii. 29. "He hath made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself:" "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."—Eph. i. 9, 11. "Christ," says an apostle, "was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."—Acts ii. 23.

"The decrees of God relate to all future things, without exception; whatever is done in time was foreordained before the beginning of time. His purpose was concerned with everything, whether great or small, whether good or evil; although, in reference to the latter, it may be necessary to distinguish between appointment and permission. It was concerned with things necessary, free, and contingent; with the movements of matter, which are necessary; with the volitions and actions of intelligent creatures, which are free; and with such things as we call accidents, because they take place undesignedly on our part, and without any cause which we could discover. It was concerned about our life and our death; about our state in time and our state in eternity. In short, the decrees of God are as comprehensive as his government, which extends to all creatures, and to all events."

The decrees of God are free. He was not impelled to decree from any exigency of the divine nature; this would be to deny his self-sufficiency. Neither was he under any external constraint; this would be destructive of his independence. His decrees, therefore, must be the sovereign and free act of his will. By this it is not meant to insinuate that they are arbitrary decisions; but merely that, in making his decrees, he was under no control, and acted according to his own sovereignty.

The decrees of God are most wise. They are called "the counsel of his will," to show that, though his will be free, yet he always acts in a manner consummately wise. He needs not to deliberate, or take counsel with others, but all his decrees are the result of unerring wisdom. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" "Wisdom is discovered in the selection of the most proper ends, and of the fittest means of accomplishing them. That this character belongs to the decrees of God is evident from what we know of them. They are disclosed to us by their execution; and every proof of wisdom in the works of God is a proof of the wisdom of the plan in conformity to which they are performed."

The decrees of God are eternal. This our Confession explicitly affirms:—"God, from all eternity, did ordain whatsoever comes to pass." This is asserted in opposition to the Socinians, who hold that some, at least, of the decrees of God are temporary. Those decrees which relate to things dependent on the free

agency of man, they maintain, are made in time. But what saith the Scripture? It expressly declares, that everything which has happened, and everything which is to happen, was known to God from everlasting. “Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world.”—Acts xv. 18. To suppose any of the divine decrees to be made in time is to suppose the knowledge of the Deity to be limited. If from eternity he knew all things that come to pass, then from eternity he must have ordained them; for if they had not been determined upon, they could not have been foreknown as certain.

The decrees of God are absolute and unconditional. He has not decreed anything, because he foresaw it as future; and the execution of his decrees is not suspended upon any condition which may, or may not be performed. This is the explicit doctrine of our Confession, and it is this principle which chiefly distinguishes Calvinists from Arminians, who maintain that God’s decrees are not absolute but conditional.

“It is granted, that some of the decrees of God are conditional, in this sense, that something is supposed to go before the event which is the object of the decree, and that, this order being established, the one will not take place without the other. He decreed, for example, to save Paul and the companions of his voyage to Italy; but he decreed to save them only on condition that the sailors should remain in the ship.—Acts xxvii. He has decreed to save many from the wrath to come; but he has decreed to save them only if they believe in Christ, and turn by him from the error of their ways. But these decrees are conditional only in appearance. They merely state the order in which the events should be accomplished; they establish a connection between the means and the end, but do not leave the means uncertain. When God decreed to save Paul and his companions, he decreed that the sailors should be prevented from leaving the ship; and accordingly gave Paul previous notice of the preservation of every person on board. When he decreed to save those who should believe, he decreed to give them faith; and, accordingly, we are informed, that those whom he predestinated he also calls into the fellowship of his Son.—Rom. viii. 30. That any decree is conditional in the sense” of Arminians, “that it depends upon the will of man, of which he is sovereign master, so that he may will or not will as he pleases,—we deny. ‘My counsel’, says God, ‘shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.’—Isa. xlvi. 10. But he could not speak so, if his counsel depended upon a condition which might not be performed.” Conditional decrees are inconsistent with the infinite wisdom of God, and are in men the effects of weakness. They are also inconsistent with the independence of God, making them to depend upon the free will or agency of his creatures. The accomplishment of them, too, would be altogether uncertain; but the Scripture assures us, that “the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”—Ps. xxiii. 11. All his purposes are unalterably determined, and their execution infallibly certain. “There are many devices in a man’s heart,” which he is unable to accomplish, “nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.”—Prov. xix. 21.

It has been often objected to the doctrine respecting the divine decrees taught in our Confession, that it represents God as the author of sin. But the Confession expressly guards against this inference, by declaring that God has so ordained whatsoever comes to pass as that he is not thereby the author of sin. The decree of God is either effective or permissive. His effective decree respects all the good that comes to pass; his permissive decree respects the evil that is in sinful actions. We must also distinguish betwixt an action purely as such, and the sinfulness of the action. The decree of God is effective with respect to the action abstractly considered; it is permissive with respect to the sinfulness of the action as a moral evil.

It has also been objected, that if God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, human liberty is taken away. To this it has been commonly replied, that it is sufficient to human liberty, that a man acts without any constraint, and according to his own free choice; that the divine decree is extrinsic to the human mind; and, while it secures the futurity of events, it leaves rational agents to act as freely as if there had been no decree. This answer, it must be acknowledged, merely amounts to an assertion that, notwithstanding the decree of God, man retains his liberty of action. We still wish to know how the divine pre-ordination of the event is consistent with human liberty. "Upon such a subject," says Dr Dick, "no man should be ashamed to acknowledge his ignorance. We are not required to reconcile the divine decrees and human liberty. It is enough to know that God has decreed all things which come to pass, and that men are answerable for their actions. Of both these truths we are assured by the Scriptures; and the latter is confirmed by the testimony of conscience. We feel that, although not independent upon God, we are free; so that we excuse ourselves when we have done our duty, and accuse ourselves when we have neglected it. Sentiments of approbation and disapprobation, in reference to our own conduct or that of other men, would have no existence in our minds if we believed that men are necessary agents. But the tie which connects the divine decrees and human liberty is invisible. 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain unto it.'"—Ps. cxxxix. 6.

It may be further observed, that, although God has unchangeably ordained whatsoever comes to pass, yet this does not take away the contingency of second causes, either in themselves or as to us. Nothing can be more contingent than the decision of the lot,—yet "the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."—Prov. xvi. 33.

SECTION III.—By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death.

SECTION IV.—These angels and men, thus predestinated and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their

number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

SECTION V.—Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

### EXPOSITION

The decree of God, with respect to the everlasting state of angels and men, is known by the name of predestination; and this consists of two branches, generally distinguished by the names of election and reprobation.

That part of the angels were elected is inferred from that passage of Scripture in which the elect angels are mentioned. 1 Tim. v. 21. Of the fallen angels two apostles make express mention. 2 Pet ii. 4; Jude 6. Thus the election of a part of the angels is explicitly taught in Scripture, and the non-election of others is necessarily implied; for election is a relative term, and necessarily involves the idea of rejection.

Of the decree of election, as it relates to men, the above sections contain a full statement, and a subsequent section states the doctrine of Scripture respecting what is usually termed the decree of reprobation. That there is such a thing as election, in some sense or other, must be admitted by all who believe the Scriptures; but many who retain the word, completely explain away the doctrine which the Bible teaches upon the subject.

Some will allow of no election but that of nations, or of whole Churches, in their collective capacity. That the Scripture speaks of such a general election is admitted; but this is not inconsistent with a particular and personal election. The Jews were a chosen generation, separated from among the other nations of the world, to be, in a peculiar manner, the people of God; but our Lord intimates that among them there was a remnant chosen in a superior sense.—Matt. xxiv. 22. The Apostle Paul also saith, “Even at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”—Rom. xi. 5. That it is of the Jews, the chosen nation, the apostle speaks, and that he distinguishes a remnant from the great body of them is sufficiently manifest; and he plainly intimates, that the former were chosen in such a sense as the latter were not.

Some allow only of an election to external privileges. Holding that the Scripture speaks solely of an election of communities, they maintain that they are only chosen to the enjoyment of the external means of salvation. But we

are assured from Scripture, that they who believe “were ordained to eternal life,” and that they were a chosen to salvation.”—Acts xiii. 48; 2 Thess. ii. 13.

Some, by election, understand no more than a separation of persons from the world, made in time, and thus identify it with their calling, or conversion. But in Scripture, election and calling are clearly distinguished; and the latter is represented as the effect of the former. Persons are said to be “called according to God’s purpose,” and “whom he did predestinate, them he also called.”—Rom. viii. 28-30. Now, predestination and the purpose of God must be very different from calling, which proceeds from it, unless the cause and the effect are the same thing. To put such interpretations upon the word election is to wrest the language of Scripture, and to impose upon it a sense contrary to its obvious meaning.

It would be tedious, and would serve no good purpose, to enumerate the multifarious opinions which have been held on this subject. It will be sufficient to mention the opinion of the Socinians, and of the Arminians. The Socinians deny the certain prescience of future contingencies, such as the determinations of free agents; and, therefore, the only decree respecting the salvation of men which they will admit to have been made from eternity, and to be unchangeable, is a general conditional decree, that such as believe and obey the gospel shall be saved; and, according to them, a special decree concerning particular persons, is only made in time, when persons perform the condition contained in the general decree. The Arminians, or Remonstrants, as they are also called, are distinguished from the Socinians, by admitting that contingent events, such as the determinations and actions of men, are foreseen by God; but they also deny absolute and unconditional election, and maintain, that whatever God has decreed respecting men, is founded on the foresight of their conduct. Having foreseen, without any decree, that Adam would involve himself and his posterity in sin and its consequences, he purposed to send his Son to die for them all, and to give them sufficient grace to improve the means of salvation; and knowing beforehand who would believe and persevere to the end, and who would not, he chose the former to eternal life, and left the latter in a state of condemnation. There is, however, a diversity of opinion among the holders of this general system; and some of them coincide with Socinians, in maintaining, that the decrees of God respecting men are not eternal, but are made in time; that men are elected to eternal life after they have believed, and that, if they fall into a state of unbelief and impenitence, the sentence or decree is reversed.

In opposition to these systems, our Confession teaches that God made choice of, and predestinated a certain and definite number of individuals to everlasting life; that he predestinated them unto life before the foundation of the world was laid; that in so doing, he acted according to his sovereign will, and was not influenced by the foresight of their faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them; and that this purpose is immutable, it being impos-

sible that any of the elect should perish. That these doctrines are in accordance with Scripture may be easily evinced.

1. God made choice of, and predestinated, a certain and definite number of individuals to everlasting life. According to the Socinians, God predestinated to eternal life, not any particular individuals of mankind, but a certain sort or description of men; not persons, but characters. The Scripture, however, clearly teaches that God made choice of a certain determinate number of persons from among the rest of the human race, and ordained them to eternal life. It is said, “The Lord knoweth them that are his.”—2 Tim. ii. 19. He perfectly knows how many, and who in particular, his elect are. Hence their names are said to be enrolled in a book, called the Book of Life; for it is the book in which are registered the names of all the individuals of mankind who were chosen to everlasting life. A person’s name is that whereby he is known and distinguished from others; when, therefore, their names are said to be written in a book, it intimates that God has an exact knowledge of all the individuals whom he has chosen.

2. God predestinated these individuals to life from eternity. According to Socinians, and some Arminians, as has been already noticed, special election only takes place in time, when persons actually believe and obey the gospel. But an election in time is at direct variance with the doctrine of Scripture. It is said (Eph. i. 4), “God hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,” and this emphatic phrase is evidently expressive of eternity. Thus Paul addresses the Thessalonian Christians, “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.”—2 These. ii. 13. That the phrase “from the beginning” denotes eternity, is evident from Prov. viii. 23, where Christ is introduced saying, “I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, ere ever the earth was.” That the phrase “from the beginning,” is here equivalent to the phrase “from everlasting,” is manifest. Indeed, we cannot conceive of any new interpretations arising in the divine mind, without supposing the Divine Being defective in knowledge, or mutable in his perfections, suppositions utterly incompatible with the nature of that Being, whose name is Jehovah.

3. In making this choice, God acted from his own sovereign will, and was not influenced by any foresight of their faith or other qualifications. According to Arminians, God’s decree respecting the salvation of men is founded upon their foreseen faith and good works. Thus, “the decree of God, although prior in time, is posterior in order to the actions of men, and is dependent upon the determination of their will. But to this opinion, so derogatory to the supreme dominion and absolute authority of God, the doctrine of Scripture is directly opposed. Election is ascribed to grace, to the exclusion of works; and these two causes are represented as incompatible and mutually destructive. ‘Even so then at this present time, there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work.’—Rom. xi. 5, 6. How is it possible to reconcile with these words the

opinion that the foresight of men's good works was the cause of the election! Besides, it is worthy of particular attention, that faith and holiness which the advocates of conditional decrees make the causes of election, are expressly said in Scripture to be the effects of it.—2 Thess. ii. 13; Eph. i. 4. In Rom. ix. 10-13, Paul produces the case of Jacob and Esau as an illustration of the subject, and traces the predestination of individuals to happiness or misery to the sovereignty of God, without any consideration of their works. As the lot of the two sons of Isaac was settled prior to their personal conduct, so the apostle signifies, that the appointment of particular persons to salvation, depends solely upon the good pleasure of God." That election is founded on the good pleasure of God, and not on anything in its objects, is clearly stated, verse 16 of the same chapter: "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy:" and also in verse 18: "Therefore he hath mercy on whom he will," &c. Were it otherwise, there would be no shadow of objection to the doctrine. "How could men say it was unjust, if God chose one and rejected another according to their works? And how could any one object, as in verse 19, 'that as the will of God could not be resisted, men were not to be blamed if the decision in question did not depend on the will of God, but on that of men? How easy for the apostle to have answered the objector, 'You are mistaken, the choice is not of God, he does not choose whom he wills, but whom he sees will choose him! It is not his will, but man's that decides the point.' Paul does not so answer, but vindicates the doctrine of the divine sovereignty. The fact, therefore, that Paul had to answer the same objections which are now constantly urged against the doctrine of election, goes far to show that the doctrine was his."

4. The purpose of God respecting his elect is immutable. As Arminians hold that saints may fall from a state of grace, so they maintain that a person, who is one of the elect today, may become one of the reprobate tomorrow. They affirm that "men may make their election void,"—that "as they change themselves from believers to unbelievers, so the divine determination concerning them changes." But the Scripture expressly declares, that "the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."—Ps. xxxlii. 11. Besides this general assurance of the immutability of his counsel, it is affirmed that "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his."—2 Tim. ii. 19. The purpose of God, according to election, shall stand; so that the number of the elect can neither be increased nor diminished.

There is one circumstance connected with election that remains to be noticed. The elect are stated to have been "chosen in Christ," which, indeed, is the express language of Scripture.—Eph. i. 4. This cannot mean that the mediatory work of Christ was the cause of their election; for, as has been already shown, election proceeds from the mere sovereign will of God; and the Scripture represents the mission of our Saviour as the effect of the love of God.—John iii. 16. The mediation of Christ was necessary, in order that the effects of



electing love might be bestowed upon Gods chosen, in a consistency with the rights and honour of his justice; but election itself originated in divine sovereignty, and had no other cause than the good pleasure of God's will.—Eph. i. 5. The divine purpose is one, embracing the means as well as the end; but according to our conceptions of the operations of the divine minds the end is first in intention, and then the means are appointed by which it is to be carried into effect. The phrase, "chosen in Christ," signifies therefore, we apprehend, that God had a respect to the mediation of Christ, not as the cause of their election, but as the means by which the purpose of election was to be executed.

SECTION VI.—As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected being fallen in Adam are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

#### EXPOSITION

In this section we have, first, a general statement, that, in the divine purpose, the means and the end are inseparably connected. As God appointed the elect to glory, so he appointed them to obtain that glory in and through Christ, and on account of his merits alone.—1 Thess. v. 9. He likewise appointed them to all those means which are indispensably necessary to the enjoyment of that glory; such as faith and sanctification, and perseverance therein to the end.—2 Thess. ii. 13. Thus, though the mediation of Christ was not the cause of their election, yet his obedience and death were the grand means appointed for the execution of that gracious purpose; and though the Almighty chose no man to glory because of his future faith and holiness, yet provision was made in the eternal purpose of God for the faith and sanctification of all his chosen, prior to their enjoyment of bliss. It is, therefore, a gross abuse of the doctrine of election, for persons to expect that they shall attain the end, while they neglect to use the appointed means. No man acts in this manner in regard to the common affairs of life, and to do so in matters of infinitely higher importance would be the highest presumption and folly.

This section next states more particularly the means by which the elect are brought to glory. They are redeemed by Christ, and his redemption is effectually applied to them by the working of his Spirit. In order to determine the import of the phrase "redeemed by Christ," it is necessary to ascertain in what sense the word redeemed is here used. The term redemption in Scripture fre-

quently signifies actual deliverance from sin and all its penal consequences; but primarily and properly it means a deliverance effected by the payment of a ransom. Hence, theologians have usually distinguished between redemption by price, and redemption by power; the latter coincides with actual deliverance; the former denotes the payment of the price, by which Christ meritoriously procured the deliverance of his people. When the Westminster Confession was compiled, the term redemption was generally used as almost exactly equivalent to the modern term atonement; and, of course, what was then called general and particular redemption, corresponds to the modern phrases, general and limited atonement. Some have contended that in this section the term redemption is equivalent, not to the payment of a price, but to the deliverance obtained through the payment of a price; or, that the word redeemed is used as equivalent to saved. But the section clearly distinguishes between the elect being redeemed, and their being saved; and it represents their redemption by Christ as being effected and completed previous to their being effectually called unto faith in Christ. Their justification, adoption, sanctification, and final salvation, are just the blessings which constitute the deliverance obtained for them through the death of Christ; and, therefore, their redemption by Christ must signify, not the deliverance itself, but the payment of the price which procured their deliverance. Their redemption by Christ is already complete,—it was finished by Christ on the cross; but their actual deliverance is to be effected in due season,—namely, when they are united to Christ by faith.

In this section, then, we are taught,—1. That Christ, by his death, did not merely render the salvation of all men possible, or bring them into a salvable state, but purchased and secured a certain salvation to all for whom he died.—John xvii. 4; Heb. iv. 12. 2. That Christ died exclusively for the elect, and purchased redemption for them alone; in other words, that Christ made atonement only for the elect, and that in no sense did he die for the rest of the race. Our Confession first asserts, positively, that the elect are redeemed by Christ; and then, negatively, that none other are redeemed by Christ but the elect only. If this does not affirm the doctrine of particular redemption, or of a limited atonement, we know not what language could express that doctrine more explicitly. It is diametrically opposed to the system of the Arminians, who hold, “that Jesus Christ, by his death and sufferings, made an atonement for the sins of all mankind in general, and of every individual in particular.” It is not less opposed to the doctrine maintained by many, that though the death of Christ had a special reference to the elect, and, in connection with the divine purpose, infallibly secures their salvation, yet that it has also a general reference, and made an equal atonement for all men. The celebrated Richard Baxter, who favoured general redemption, makes the following remark upon this and another section of our Confession:—”Chap. iii. sec. 6, and chap. viii. sec. 8, which speak against universal redemption, I understand not of all redemption, and particularly not of the mere bearing the punishment of man’s sins, and satisfying God’s justice, but of that special redemption proper to the elect, which was

accompanied with an intention of actual application of the saving benefits in time. If I may not be allowed this interpretation, I must herein dissent." The language of the Confession; in my opinion, will not admit of this interpretation; and, what is more, the Bible is silent about this general redemption, or the general reference of the death of Christ. The Saviour himself declares, "I lay down my life for the sheep;" and he affirms that the sheep for whom he laid down his life are the definite number chosen by God, and given to him in the eternal covenant, and to whom he will eventually give eternal life.—John x. 15, 28, 29. "It is true, the Christian religion being to be distinguished from the Jewish in this main point, that whereas the Jewish was restrained to Abraham's posterity, and confined within one race and nation, the Christian was to be preached to every creature, universal words are used concerning the death of Christ; but as the words, 'preaching to every creature,' and to 'all the world,' are not to be understood in the utmost extent,—for then they have never been verified, since the gospel has never yet, for aught that appears to us, been preached to every nation under heaven,—but are only to be explained generally of a commission not limited to one or more nations, none being excluded from it; the apostles were to execute it, in going from city to city, as they should be inwardly moved to it by the Holy Ghost; so 'Calvinists' think, that those large words that are applied to the death of Christ, are to be understood in the same qualified manner; that no nation, or sort of men, are excluded from it, and that some of all kinds and sorts shall be saved by him. And this is to be carried no further, without an imputation on the justice of God; for if he has received a sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, it is not reconcilable to justice, that all should not be saved by it, or should not at least have the offer and promulgation of it made them; that so a trial may be made, whether they will accept of it or not."

3. We are further taught, that salvation shall be effectually applied by the Holy Spirit, to all those who were chosen of God, and redeemed by Christ; and that it shall be effectually applied to them alone. The elect are all in due time, by the power of the Spirit, effectually called unto faith in Christ. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me."—John vi. 37. "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed."—Acts xiii. 48. They are all justified, adopted, sanctified, and shall be enabled to persevere in grace, and at length their salvation shall be consummated in glory. "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."—Rom. viii. 30.

Thus our Confession, agreeably to Scripture, represents each of the divine persons as acting a distinct part in the glorious work of human redemption, and as entirely concurring in counsel and operation. The Father chose a definite number of mankind sinners to eternal life; the Son laid down his life for those who were chosen in him before the foundation of the world, and obtained for them eternal redemption, and the Holy Spirit applies the pure redemption to them in due season. Here all is perfect harmony. The Son fulfils

the will of the Father, and the Spirit's work is in entire accordance with the purpose of the Father and the mediation of the Son. But according to the scheme of general redemption, or of universal atonement, this harmony is utterly destroyed. The Son sheds his blood for multitudes whom the Father never purposed to save, and the Spirit does not put forth the influence necessary to secure the application of salvation to all for whom Christ died!

SECTION VII.—The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.

#### EXPOSITION

This section describes what is usually called the decree of reprobation. This term is not used in the Confession, and when it occurs in Scripture, bears a different sense from the theological; but for the sake of convenience, it is used to express that act of God's will by which, when he viewed all mankind as involved in guilt and misery, he rejected some, while he chose others. Some, who allow of personal and eternal election, deny any such thing as reprobation. But the one unavoidably follows from the other; for the choice of some must necessarily imply the rejection of others. "Election and rejection are co-relative terms; and men impose upon themselves, and imagine that they conceive what it is impossible to conceive, when they admit election and deny reprobation.... There are many passages of Scripture in which this doctrine is taught. We read of some whose names are 'not written,' and who, consequently, are opposed to those whose names are written, 'in the Book of Life;' who are 'vessels of wrath fitted to destruction;' who were 'before of old ordained to condemnation;' who 'stumble at the Word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed;' of persons whom God is said to hate, while others he loves. Let any man carefully and dispassionately read the 9th and the 11th chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, and he will entertain no more doubt that some are ordained to death, than that others are ordained to life."

Our Confession speaks of God's passing by some, and also ordaining them to wrath; and we apprehend there is an important distinction betwixt the two. If the reason be inquired why God passed by some of mankind sinners, while he elected others to life, it must be resolved into the counsel of his own will, whereby he extends or withholds mercy as he pleases. No doubt those whom God passed by were considered as fallen and guilty creatures; but if there was sin in them, there was sin also in those who were chosen to salvation; we must, therefore, resolve their opposite allotment into the will of God: "He hath

mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”—Rom. ix. 18. As it would have been just in God to pass by the whole of our race, and to deal with them as he did with the angels who sinned, it must be manifest that, in electing some to life, he did no injustice to the non-elect, whose case would have been just as bad as it is, even supposing the others had not been chosen at all. But if the reason be inquired why God ordained to dishonour and wrath those whom he passed by, this must be resolved into their own sin. In this act God appears as a judge, fixing beforehand the punishment of the guilty; and his decree is only a purpose of acting towards them according to the natural course of justice. Their own sin is the procuring cause of their final ruin, and therefore God does them no wrong. The salvation of the elect is wholly “to the praise of his glorious grace,” and the condemnation of the non-elect is “to the praise of his glorious justice.”

SECTION VIII.—The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending to the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.

#### EXPOSITION

The doctrine of predestination is, indeed, a high mystery—one of the deep things of God, which our feeble intellects cannot fully comprehend. In our inquiries about it, we ought to repress a vain curiosity, and not attempt to be wise above what is written. But, since the doctrine is revealed by God in his Word, it is a proper subject for sober investigation, and ought to be published from the pulpit and the press. Calvin justly remarks, “That those things which the Lord hath laid up in secret, we may not search; those things which he hath brought openly abroad, we may not neglect; lest either on the one part we be condemned of vain curiosity, or on the other part, of unthankfulness.” Were this doctrine either dangerous or useless, God would not have revealed it; and for men to attempt to suppress it, is to arraign the wisdom of God, as though he foresaw not the danger which they would arrogantly interpose to prevent. “Whosoever,” adds Calvin, “labours to bring the doctrine of predestination into misliking, he openly saith evil of God; as though somewhat had unadvisedly slipped from him which is hurtful to the Church.” This doctrine, however, ought to be handled with special judgment and prudence, avoiding human speculations, and adhering to what is plainly revealed in the Scriptures. When prudently discussed, it will neither lead to licentiousness nor to despair; but

will eminently conduce to the knowledge, establishment, and comfort of Christians.

It ought ever to be remembered, that no man can know his election prior to his conversion. Wherefore, instead of prying into the secret purpose of God, he ought to attend to his revealed will, that by making sure his vocation, he may ascertain his election. The order and method in which this knowledge may be attained is pointed out by the Apostle Peter, when he exhorts Christians to “give all diligence to make their calling and election sure.”—2 Pet. i. 10. Their eternal election must remain a profound secret until it be discovered to them by their effectual calling in time; but when they have ascertained their calling they may thence infallibly conclude that they were elected from eternity. Election, then, gives no discouragement to any man in reference to obeying the calls and embracing the offers of the gospel. The invitations of the gospel are not addressed to men as elect, but as sinners ready to perish; all are under the same obligation to comply with these invitations, and the encouragement from Christ is the same to all,—”Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” And the doctrine of election must have a sanctifying and consoling influence on all who sincerely obey the gospel. It is calculated to inspire them with sentiments of reverence and gratitude towards God; to humble their souls in the dust before the eternal Sovereign; to excite them to diligence in the discharge of duty; to afford them strong consolation under the temptations and trials of life; and to animate them with a lively hope of eternal glory.