
Of the Decrees of God

by Hugh Binning

Lecture 14 on Christian Doctrine

"Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." – Eph 1:11.

"He is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth." – Job 23:13

Having spoken something before of God, in his nature and being and properties, we come, in the next place, to consider his glorious majesty, as he stands in some nearer relation to his creatures, the work of his hands. For we must conceive the first rise of all things in the world to be in this self-being; the first conception of them to be in the womb of God's everlasting purpose and decree; which, in due time, according to his appointment, brings forth the child of the creature to the light of actual existence and being. It is certain that his majesty might have endured for ever, and possessed himself without any of these things. If he had never resolved to create any thing without himself, he had been blessed then, as now, because of his full and absolute self-sufficient perfection. His purposing to make a world, and his doing of it, adds nothing to his inward blessedness and contentment. This glorious and holy One encloses within his own being all imaginable perfections, in an infinite and transcendent manner; that if you remove all created ones, you diminish nothing; if you add them all, you increase nothing. Therefore it was in the superabundance of his perfection, that he resolved to show his glory thus in the world. It is the creature's indigence and limited condition which maketh it needful to go without its own compass, for the happiness of its own being. Man cannot be happy in loving himself. He is not satisfied with his own intrinsic perfections, but he must diffuse himself by his affections and desires and endeavours, and, as it were, walks abroad upon these legs, to fetch in some supply from the creature or Creator. The creature is constrained out of some necessity thus to go out of itself, which speaks much indigence and want within itself. But it is not so with his majesty. His own glorious Being contents him; his happiness is to

know that, and delight in it, because it comprehends in itself all that is at all possible, in the most excellent and perfect manner that is conceivable, – nay, infinitely beyond what can be conceived by any but himself. So he needs not go outside himself to seek love or delight, for it is all within him, and it cannot be without his own Being, unless it flow from within him. Therefore ye may find in Scripture what complacency God hath in himself, and the Father in the Son, and the Son in the Father. We find, Prov. 8, how the wisdom of God, our Lord Jesus, was the Father’s delight from all eternity, and the Father again his delight; for he rejoiced always before him, ver. 30. And this was an all-sufficient possession that one had of another, ver. 22. The love between the Father and the Son is holden out as the first pattern of all loves and delights, John 17:23, 24. This then flows from the infinite excess of perfection and exundation of self-being, that his majesty is pleased to come without himself, to manifest his own glory in the works of his hands, to decree and appoint other things beside himself, and to execute that decree. We may consider in these words some particulars for our edification:

I. That the Lord hath from eternity purposed within himself and decreed to manifest his own glory in the making and ruling of the world; that there is a counsel and purpose of his will which reaches all things, which have been, are now, or are to be after this. This is clear, for he works all things “according to the counsel of his own will.”

II. That his mind and purpose is one mind, one counsel. I mean not only one for ever, that is, perpetual and unchangeable, as the words speak, – but also one for all, that is, with one simple act or resolution of his holy will he hath determined all these several things, all their times, their conditions, their circumstances.

III. That whatsoever he hath from all eternity purposed, he in time practiseth it, and comes to execution and working; so that there is an exact correspondence betwixt his will and his work, his mind and his hand. He works according to the counsel of his will, and whatsoever his soul desireth that he doeth.

IV. That his purpose and performance is infallible, – irresistible by any created power. Himself will not change it, for ‘he is in one mind;’ and none else can hinder it, for ‘who can turn him?’ He

desireth and he doeth it, as in the original. There is nothing intervenes between the desire and the doing, that can hinder the meeting of these two.

The first is the constant doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, of which ye should consider four things: 1st, That his purpose and decree is most wise. Therefore Paul cries out upon such a subject, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!' Rom. 11:33. His will is always one with wisdom; therefore you have the purpose of his will mentioned thus, 'the counsel of his will;' for his will, as it were, takes counsel and advice of wisdom, and discerns according to the depth and riches of his knowledge and understanding. We see among men these are separated often, and there is nothing in the world so disorderly, so unruly and uncomely, as when will is divided from wisdom. When men follow their own will and lusts as a law, against their conscience, that is monstrous. The understanding and reason are the eyes of the will; if these be put out, or if a man leave them behind him, he cannot but fall into a pit. But the purposes of God's will are depths of wisdom, nay, his very will is a sufficient rule and law; so that it may be well used of him, *Stat pro ratione voluntas*,¹¹ Rom 9:11-18. If we consider the glorious fabric of the world, – the order established in it, – the sweet harmony it keepeth in all its motions and successions, – O it must be a wise mind and counsel that contrived it! Man now having the idea of this world in his mind, might fancy and imagine many other worlds bearing some proportion and resemblance to this. But if he had never seen nor known this world, he could never have imagined the thousandth part of this world; he could in nowise have formed an image in his mind of all those different kinds of creatures. Creatures must have some example and copy to look to; but what was his pattern? 'Who hath been his counselor' to teach him? Rom. 11:34. Who gave him the first rudiments or principles of that art? Surely none. He had no pattern given him, – not the least idea of any of these things furnished him, – but it is absolutely and solely his own wise contrivance. – 2d, This purpose of God is most free and absolute; there is no cause, no reason, why he hath thus disposed all things, and not otherwise, as he might have done, but his own good will and pleasure. If

¹¹ [That is, "His will stands for reason." Juv. Sat. vi. ver. 222. — ED (Rev. M. Leishman, Minister of the Parish of Govan).]

it be so in a matter of deepest concernment, (Rom 9:18,) it must be so also in all other things. We may find, indeed, many inferior causes, – many peculiar reasons for such and such a way of administration, – many ends and uses for which they serve, – for there is nothing that his majesty hath appointed but it is for some use and reason, – yet we must rise above all these, and ascend into the tower of his most high will and pleasure, which is founded on a depth of wisdom; and from thence we shall behold all the order, administration, and use of the creatures to depend. And herein is a great difference between his majesty's purpose and ours. You know there is still something presented under the notion of good and convenient, that moves our will, and inclines us for its own goodness to seek after it, and so to fall upon the means to compass it. Therefore, the end which we propose to ourselves hath its influence upon our purposes, and pleasures them; so that from it the motion seems to proceed first, and not so much from within; but there is no created thing can thus determine his majesty. Himself, his own glory, is the great end which he loves for itself, and for which he loves other things. But among other things, though there be many of them ordained one for another's use, yet his will and pleasure is the original of that order. He doth not *find* it, but *makes* it. You see all the creatures below are appointed for man, as their immediate and next end, for his use and service. But was it man's goodness and perfection which did move and incline his majesty to this appointment? No, indeed! But of his own good will he makes such things serve man, that all of them together may be for his own glory. – 3d, The Lord's decree is the original source of all things that are, or have been, or are to come. This is the first original of them all, to which they must be reduced as their spring and fountain. All of you may understand that there are many things possible, which yet actually will never be. The Lord's power and omnipotency is of a further extent than his decree and purpose. His power is natural and essential to his being; his decree is of choice, and voluntary. The Father could have sent a legion of angels to have delivered his Son; the Son could have asked them, but neither of them would do it, Matt. 26:53. The Lord could have raised up children to Abraham out of stones, but he would not, Matt. 3:9. His power then comprehends within its reach all possible things which do not in their own nature and proper conception imply a contradiction; so that infinite worlds of creatures more perfect than this, – numbers of angels and men above these, – and creatures in glory surpassing them again, – are within the

compass of the boundless power and omnipotency of God. But yet for all this it might have fallen out that nothing should actually and really have been, unless his majesty had of his own free will decreed what is, or hath been, or is to be. His will determines his power, and, as it were, puts it in the nearest capacity to act and exercise itself. Here, then, we must look for the first beginning of all things that are. They are conceived in the womb of the Lord's everlasting purpose, as he speaks, Zeph. 2:2. The decree is, as it were, with child of beings, Isa. 44:7. It is God's royal prerogative to appoint things to come, and none can share with him in it. From whence is it, I pray you, that of so many worlds which his power could have framed, this one is brought to light? Is it not because this one was formed, as it were, in the belly of his eternal counsel and will? From whence is it that so many men are, and no more – that our Lord Jesus was slain, when the power of God might have kept him alive, – that those men, Judas, &c. were the doers of it, when others might have done it? From whence are all those actions, good or evil, under the sun, which he might have prevented, but from his good will and pleasure, from his determinate counsel? Acts 4:28. Can you find the original of these in the creature, why it is thus, and why not otherwise? Can you conceive why, of all the infinite numbers of possible beings these are, and no other? And, what hath translated that number of creatures, which is, from the state of pure possibility to futurity or actual being, but the decisive vote of God's everlasting purpose and counsel? Therefore we should always conceive, that the creatures, and all their actions, which have, or will have any being in the world, have first had a being in the womb of God's eternal counsel, and that his will and pleasure hath passed upon all things that are and are not. His counsel has concluded of things that have been, or will be, that thus they shall be; and his counsel determined of all other things which are also possible, that they shall never come forth into the light of the world, but remain in the dark bowels of omnipotency, that so we may give him the glory of all things that are not, and that are at all. – Then, 4th. We should consider the extent of his decree and counsel; it is passed upon all things; it is universal, reaching every being or action of the universe. This is the strain of the whole Scripture. He did not, as some dream, once create the creatures in a good state, and put them in capacity henceforth to preserve them selves, or exercise their own virtue and power, without dependence on Him, as an artificer makes an horologe, and orders it in all things, that it may do its business without

him. He is not only a general original of action and motion, as if he would command a river to flow by his appointed channels; as if he did only work, and rule the world by attorneys and ambassadors. That is the weakness and infirmity of earthly kings, that they must substitute deputies for themselves. But this King appoints all immediately, and disposes upon all the particular actions of his creatures, good or evil; and so he is universal absolute Lord of the creature, of its being and doing. It were a long work to rehearse what the Scripture speaks of this kind; but O! that ye would read them oftener, and ponder them better, how there is nothing in this world, – which may seem to fall out by chance to you, that you know not how it is to come to pass, and can see no cause nor reason of it, – but it falls out by the holy will of our blessed Father. Be it of greater or less moment, – or be it a hair of thy head fallen, or thy head cut off, – the most dependent and contingent thing, – though it surprised the whole world of men and angels, that they should wonder from whence it did proceed, – it is no surprise to him, for he not only knew it, but appointed it. The most certain and necessary thing, according to the course of nature, it hath no certainty but from his appointment, who hath established such a course in the creatures, and which he can suspend when he pleaseth. Be it the sin of men and devils, which seems most opposite to his holiness, yet even that cannot appear in the world of beings, if it were not, in a holy, righteous, and permissive way, first conceived in the womb of his eternal counsel, and if it were not determined by him, for holy and just ends, Acts 4:28.

The second thing propounded is, that his mind and counsel is one; one and the same, 'yesterday, to-day, and for ever.' Therefore the apostle speaks of God, that there is no shadow of change or turning in him, James 1:17. He is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it?' Numb. 23:19. And shall he decree, and not execute it? Shall he purpose, and not perform it? 'I am the Lord, I change not;' that is his name, Mal. 3:6. 'The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations,' Psal. 33:11. Men change their mind oftener than their garments. Poor vain man, even in his best estate, is changeableness, and vicissitude itself, altogether vanity! And this ariseth, partly from the imperfection of his understanding, and his ignorance, because he does not understand what may fall out. There are many things secret and hidden, which if he discovered, he would not be of that judgment; and many

things may fall out which may give ground of another resolution: and partly from the weakness and perverseness of his will, that cannot be constant in any good thing, and is not so closely united to it, as that no fear or terror can separate from it. But there is no such imperfection in him, neither ignorance nor weakness. 'All things are naked' before him; all their natures, their circumstances, all events, all emergencies, known to him are they, and 'all his works from the beginning,' as perfectly as in the end. And therefore he may come to a fixed resolution from all eternity; and being resolved, he can see no reason of change, because there can nothing appear after, which he did not perfectly discover from the beginning. Therefore, whenever ye read in the Scripture of the Lord's repenting – as Gen. 6:7. Jer. 18:8. – ye should remember that the Lord speaks in our terms, and, like nurses with their children, uses our own dialect, to point out to us our great ignorance of his majesty, that cannot conceive more honourably of him, nor more distinctly of ourselves. When he changeth all things about him, he is not changed, for all these changes were at once in his mind; but when he changeth his outward dispensations, he is said to repent of what he is doing, because we do not usually change our manner of dealing, without some conceived grief, or repentance and change of mind. When a man goes to build a house, he hath no mind but that it should continue so. He hath not the least thought of taking it down again; but afterwards it becomes ruinous, and his estate enlarges, and then he takes a new resolution, to cast it down to the ground and build a better. Thus it is with man; according as he varies his work, he changes his mind. But it is not so with God. All these changes of his works, – all the successions of times, the variation of dealings, the alteration of dispensations in all ages, – were at once in his mind, and all before him; so that he never goes to build a house but he hath in his own mind already determined all the changes it shall be subject to. When he sets up a throne in a nation, it is in his mind within such a period to cast it down again; when he lifts up men in success and prosperity, he doth not again change his mind when he throws them down, for that was in his mind also; so that there is no surprise of him by any unexpected emergence. Poor man hath many consultations ere he come to a conclusion; but it is not thus with his counsel. Of all those strange and new things which fall out in our days, he hath one thought of them all from eternity. 'He is in one mind,' and none of all these things have put him off his eternal mind or put him to a new advisement about his great

projects. Not only doth he not change his mind, but his mind and thought is one of all, and concerning all. Our poor, narrow, and limited minds, must part their thoughts among many Businesses, – one thought for this, another for that, and one after another. But with him there is neither succession of counsels and purposes, nor yet plurality; but, as with one opening of his eye, he beholds all things as they are, so with one inclination, or nod of his will, he hath given a law, and appointed all things.² If we can at one instant, and one look, see both light and colours, and both the glass and the shadow in it, and with one motion of our wills move towards the end and the means; O, how much more may he, with one simple undivided act of his good will and pleasure, pass a determination on all things, in their times, and orders, and in his own infinite and glorious Being perceive them all with one look! How much consolation might redound from this to believing souls! Hath the Lord appointed you to suffer persecution and tribulation here? Hath he carved out such a lot unto you in this life? Then withal consider, that his majesty hath eternal glory wrapt up in the same counsel from which thy afflictions proceed. Hath he made thy soul to melt before him? Hath he convinced thee, and made thee to flee unto the city for refuge, and expect salvation from no other but himself? Then know, that life eternal is in the bosom of that same purpose which gave thee to believe this; though the one be born before the other, yet the decree shall certainly bring forth the other. And for such souls as upon this vain presumption of the infallibility of God's purposes, think it needless to give diligence in religion, know, that it is one mind and purpose that hath linked the end and the means together as a chain; and therefore, if thou expectest to be saved, according to election, thou must, according to the same counsel, make thy calling home from sin to God sure.

Thirdly, What thing soever he hath purposed, he in due time applies to the performance of it, and then the counsel of his will becomes

² [Mr. Binning was a Supralapsarian. In this and the two following Lectures, he treats of the "high mystery of predestination," the consideration of which, though it should be "handled with special prudence and care," (West. Conf. of Faith, ch. 3.) is nevertheless "full of sweet pleasant and unspeakable comfort to godly persons." Art. of Ch. of Eng. Art. xvii. His views of this mysterious doctrine are stated with singular clearness, and the objections to it, which he notices and answers, are brought forward with the utmost ingenuousness and candour, and expressed, it must be admitted, as strongly as a caviller could desire. — ED.]

the works of his hands, and there is an admirable harmony and exact agreement between these two. All things come out of the womb of his eternal decree, by the word of his power, even just fashioned and framed, as their lineaments and draughts were proportioned in the decree, nothing failing, nothing wanting, nothing exceeding. There is nothing in the idea of his mind but it is expressed in the work of his hands. There are no under-cooked half-wishes in God. Men have such imperfect desires, – I would have, or do, such a thing if it were not, &c. He wavers not thus in suspense; but what he wills and desires, he wills and desires indeed. He intends, doubtless, it shall be, and what he intends he will execute and bring to pass; therefore his will in due time applies almighty power to fulfil the desire of it; and almighty power being put to work by his will, it cannot but work all things ‘according to the counsel of his will;’ and whatsoever his soul desireth, that he cannot but do, even as he desires, seeing he can do it. If he will do it, and can do it, what hinders him to work and do? Know then that his commands and precepts to you signifying what is your duty, they do not so much signify what he desires, or intends to work, or have done, as his approbation of such a thing in itself to be your duty; and therefore though he have revealed his will concerning our duty, though no obedience follow, yet is not his intention frustrated or disappointed; for his commands to you say not what is his intention about it, but what is that which he approves as good, and a duty obliging men. But whatsoever thing he purposes and intends should be, certainly he will do it, and make it to be done. If it be a work of his own power alone, himself will do it alone. If he require the concurrence of creatures to it, – as in all the works of providence, – then he will effectually apply the creatures to his work, and not wait in suspense on their determination. If he have appointed such an end to be attained by such means, – if he have a work to do by such instruments, – then, without all doubt, he will apply the instruments when his time comes, and will not wait on their concurrence. You see now strange things done, you wonder at them: how we are brought down from our excellency, – how our land is laid desolate by strangers, – how many instruments of the Lord’s work are laid aside, how he lifts up a rod of indignation against us, and is like to overturn even the foundations of our land,³ – all these were

³ [The reader will remember that at this time the country was convulsed from one end of it to the other. — ED.]

not in our mind before, but they were in his mind from eternity, and therefore he is now working it. Believe then that there is not a circumstance of all this business, not one point or jot of it, but is even as it was framed and carved out of old. His present works are according to an ancient pattern, which he carries in his mind. All the measures and degrees of your affliction, – all the ounces and grain-weights of your cup, were all weighed in the scales of his eternal counsel; the instruments, the time, the manner, all that is in it. If he change instruments, that was in his mind; if he change dispensations, that was in his mind also; and seeing ye know by the scriptures that a blessed end is appointed for the godly, that all things work for their good, that all is subservient to the church's welfare; seeing, I say, you know his purpose is such as the scripture speaks, then believe his performance shall tie exact accordingly, nothing deficient; no joint, no sinew in all his work of providence, no line in all his book and volume of the creature, but it was written in that ancient book of his eternal counsel, and first fashioned in that, Psal. 139:16.

Then, lastly, His will is irresistible, his counsel shall stand; who can turn him from his purpose, and who can hinder him from performance? Therefore he attains his end in the highest and most superlative degree of certainty and infallibility. Himself will not change his own purpose; for why should he do it? If he change to the better, then it reflects on his wisdom; if he change to the worse, it reflects both on his wisdom and goodness. Certainly he can see no cause why he should change it. But as himself cannot change, so none can hinder his performance; for what power, think you, shall it be, that may attempt that? Is it the power of men, of strong men, of high men, of any men? No sure! For their breath is in their nostrils, they have no power but as he breathes in them. If he keep in his breath, as it were, they perish. All nations are as nothing before him, and what power hath nothing? Is it devils may do it? No; for they cannot, though they would; he chains them, he limits them. Is it good angels? They are powerful indeed, but they neither can nor will resist his will. Let it be the whole university of the creation, – suppose all their scattered force and virtue conjoined in one, – yet it is all but finite, it amounts to no more, if you would eternally add unto it; but all victory and resistance of this kind must be by a superior power, or at least by an equal. Therefore we may conclude that there is no impediment or let, that can be put in his way, nothing can obstruct his purpose; if all the world should conspire as one man to obstruct the performance of any of his promises and

purposes, they do but rage in vain. Like dogs barking at the moon, they shall be so far from attaining their purpose, that his majesty shall disabuse them, so to speak, to his own purpose. He shall apply them quite contrary to their own mind, to work out the counsel of his mind. Here is the absolute King, only worth the name of a King and Lord, whom all things in heaven and earth obey at the first nod and beckoning to them! Hills, seas, mountains, rivers, sun and moon, and clouds, men and beasts, angels and devils, – all of them are acted, moved, and inclined according to his pleasure; all of them are about his work indeed, as the result of all in the end shall make it appear, and are servants at his command, going where he bids go, and coming where he bids come, led by an invisible hand, though in the meantime they know it not, but think they are about their own business, and applaud themselves for a time in it. *Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt.*⁴ Godly men who know his will and love it, are led by it willingly, for they yield themselves up to his disposal; but wicked men, who have contrary wills of their own, can gain no more by resisting, but to be drawn along with it.

Now to what purpose is all this spoken of God's decrees and purposes, which he hath called a secret belonging to himself? If his works and judgments be a great depth, and unsearchable, sure his decrees are far more unsearchable; for it is the secret and hidden purpose of God, which is the very depth of his way and judgment. But to what purpose is it all? I say, not to inquire curiously into the particulars of them, but to profit by them. The Scripture holds out to us the unchangeableness, freedom, extent, holiness, and wisdom of them, for our advantage; and if this advantage be not reaped, we know them in vain. Not to burden your memory with many particulars, we should labour to draw forth both instruction and consolation out of them. Instruction, I say, in two things especially, – to submit with reverence and respect to his majesty in all his works and ways, and to trust in him who knows all his works, and will not change his mind.

There is nothing wherein I know Christians more deficient than in this point of submission, which I take to be one of the chiefest and sweetest, though hardest duties of a Christian. It is hardly to be found among men, – a thorough compliance of the soul to what his soul desires,

⁴ [That is, "Fate leads the willing, and drags the unwilling." — ED.]

a real subjection of our spirits to his good-will and pleasure. There is nothing so much blessed in scripture as waiting on him, as yielding to him to be disposed upon, – ‘Blessed are all they that wait on him.’ Pride is the greatest opposite, and he opposes himself most to that, for it is in its own nature most derogatory to the highness and majesty of God, which is his very glory. Therefore submission is most acceptable to him, when the soul yields itself and its will to him. He condescends far more to it; he cannot be an enemy to such a soul. Submission to his majesty’s pleasure, is the very bowing down of the soul willingly to any thing he does or commands, – whatever yoke he puts on, of duty or suffering, to take it on willingly, without answering again, which is the great sin condemned in servants; to put the mouth in the dust, and to keep silence, because he doth it – ‘I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.’ *There* is submission indeed, – silence of mind and mouth, – a restraint put upon the spirit to think nothing grudgingly of him for any thing he doth. It is certainly the greatest fault of Christians, and ground of many more, that ye do not look to God, but to creatures in any thing that befalls you; therefore there are so frequent risings of spirits against his yoke, frequent spurnings against it, as Ephraim, unaccustomed with the yoke. So do ye; and this it is only makes it heavy and troublesome. If there were no more reason for it but your own gain, it is the only way to peace and quietness. *Durum: sed levius fit patientia, quicquid corrigere est nefas.*⁵ Your impatience cannot help you, but hurt you, it is the very yoke of your yoke; but quiet and silent stooping makes it easy in itself, and brings in more help beside, even divine help. Learn this, I beseech you, to get your own wills abandoned, and your spirits subdued to God, both in the point of duty and dispensation. If duties commanded cross thy spirit – as certainly the reality and exercise of godliness must be unpleasant to any nature – know what thou art called to, to quiet thy own will to him, to give up thyself to his pleasure singly, without so much respect to thy own pleasure or gain. Learn to obey him simply because he commands, though no profit redound to thee; and by this means thou shalt in due time have more sweet peace and real gain, though thou intendedst it not. And in case any dispensation cross thy mind, let not thy mind rise up against it.

⁵ [“This was the only consolation which one learned Roman could administer to another on the death of a friend. “This is hard:” said he, “but what cannot be remedied is more easily borne, with patience.” Hor. Carm. lib. I. carm. xxiv. — ED.]

Do not fall out with Providence, but commit thy way wholly to him, and let him do what he pleases in that. Be thou minding thy duty. Be not anxious in that, but be diligent in this, and thou shalt be the only gainer by it; besides, the honour redounds to him.

Then I would exhort you, from this ground, to trust in him. Seeing he alone is the absolute Sovereign Lord of all things, – seeing he has passed a determination upon all things, and accordingly they must be, – and seeing none can turn him from his way, – O then, Christians, learn to commit yourselves to him in all things, both for this life and the life to come! Why are ye so vain and foolish as to depend and hang upon poor, vain, depending creatures? Why do ye not forsake yourselves? Why do ye not forsake all other things as empty shadows? Are not all created powers, habits, gifts, graces, strength, riches, &c. like the idols in comparison of him, who can neither do good, neither can they do ill? Cursed is he 'that trusteth in man,' Jer. 17:5. There needs no other curse than the very disappointment you shall meet withal. Consider, I beseech you, that our God can do all things, whatever he pleases, in heaven and earth, and that none can obstruct his pleasure. Blessed is that soul for whom the counsel of his will is engaged. And it is engaged for all that trust in him. He can accomplish his good pleasure in thy behalf, either without or against means; all impediments and thorns set in his way, he can burn them up. You who are heirs of the promises, O know your privilege! What his soul desireth, he doth even that; and what he hath seriously promised to you, he desires. If you ask, who are heirs of the promises? I would answer, simply those and those only, who do own them and challenge them, and cling to them for their life and salvation; those who seek the inheritance only by the promise, and whose soul desires them and embraces them. O if you would observe how unlike ye are to God! Ye change often, ye turn often out of the way; but that were not so ill if ye did not imagine him to be like yourselves, and it is unbelief which makes him like to yourselves, – when your frame and tender disposition changes, – when presence and access to God is removed. That is wrong, it speaks out a mortal creature indeed; but if it be so, O do no more wrong! Do not, by your suspicions and jealousies, and questionings of him, imagine that he is like unto you, and changed also. That is a double wrong and dishonour to his majesty. Hath he not said, 'I am the Lord, and change not.' 'He is in one mind, who can turn him?' How comes it then, that ye doubt of his love as oft as ye change? When ye are in a good temper, ye think he loves you: when it is

not so, ye cannot believe but he is angry, and hates you. Is not this to speak quite contrary to the word; that he is a God that changes, – that he is not in one mind, but now in one, and then in another, as oft as the inconstant wind of a soul's self-pleasing humour turns about? Here is your rest and confidence, if you will be established, not within yourselves, – not upon marks and signs within you, which ebb and flow as the sea, and change as the moon, – but, upon his unchangeable nature and faithful promises. This we desire to hold out to you all, as one ground for all. You would every one have some particular ground in your own disposition and condition, and think it general doctrine only which layeth it not home so; but believe it, I know no ground of real soul-establishment, but general truths and principles common to you all; and our business is not to lay any other foundation, – or more foundations, according to your different conditions, – but to lay this one foundation, Christ and God unchangeable; and to exhort every one of you to make that general foundation your own in particular, by leaning to it, and building upon it, and clinging to it. All other are sandy and ruinous.

Let us now, in this sad time, press consolation from this. The Lord's hand is in all this. It is immediate in every dispensation, and it is only carnal mindedness that cannot see him stretching out his hand to every man, with his own portion of affliction. Know this one thing, that God is in one mind; for all these many ways and judgments, he is in one mind, – to gather the saints, to build up the Church, the body of Christ. This is his end, – all other businesses are in by the by, and subservient to this. Therefore he will change it as he pleases, but his great purpose of good to his people all the world cannot hinder. Let us then establish our souls in this consideration; all is clear above, albeit cloudy below; all is calm in heaven, albeit tempestuous here upon earth. There is no confusion, no disorder in *his* mind. Though we think the world out of course, and that all things reel about with confusion, he hath one mind in it, and who can turn him? And that mind is good to them that trust in him; and therefore, who can turn away our good? Let men consult and imagine what they please, – let them pass votes and decrees what to do with his people, – yet it is all to no purpose, for there is a counsel above, an older counsel, which must stand and take place in all generations. If men's conclusions be not according to the counsel of his will, they are but imaginary dreams, like the fancies of a distracted person, who imagining himself a king, sits down on the throne, and gives out decrees and ordinances. May not he who sits

in heaven laugh at the foolishness and madness of men who act in all things as if they had no dependence on him, and go about their business as if it were not contrived already? It is a ridiculous thing for men to order their business, and settle their own conclusions, without once minding One above them, who hath not only a negative, but an affirmative vote in all things. It is true that God, in his deep wisdom, hath kept up his particular purposes secret, that men may walk according to an appointed rule, and use all means for compassing their intended ends; and therefore it is well said, *Prudens futuri temporis exitum caliginosâ nocte premit Deus* (The All-Knowing God holds future events in his grasp as they proceed out of the darkness of night). But yet withal we should mind that of James, 'if the Lord will,' and go about all things even the most probably, with submission to his will and pleasure. And therefore, when men go without their bounds, either in fear or danger, or joy conceived in successes, – *ridetque, si mortalis ultra fas trepidet* (He will smile, who fears death more than divine judgement), &c. – Excess of fear, excess of hope, excess of joy in these outward things is, as it were, ridiculous to him, who hath all these things appointed with him. To him be praise and glory.