

Whitefield's Letter to Wesley on Election



George Whitefield



A Letter from
George Whitefield
to the
Rev. Mr. John Wesley

IN ANSWER TO MR. WESLEY'S SERMON ENTITLED

“FREE GRACE”

*“But when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face,
because he was to be blamed” (Gal. 2:11).*

*Modernized and annotated by
William H. Gross www.onthewing.org Mar 2015*

PREFACE

I am very well aware what different effects publishing this letter against the dear Mr. Wesley's Sermon¹ will produce. Many of my friends who are strenuous advocates for universal redemption will immediately be offended. Many who are zealous on the other side will be much rejoiced. Those who are lukewarm on both sides, and are carried away with carnal reasoning, will wish this matter had never been brought under debate.

The reasons I have given at the beginning of the letter, I think are sufficient to satisfy all of my conduct in this. I desire therefore that those who hold election would not triumph, or make a party on one hand (for I detest any such thing) — and that those who are prejudiced against that doctrine not be too concerned or offended on the other.

Known to God are all his ways from the beginning of the world. The great day will reveal why the Lord permits dear Mr. Wesley and me to be of a different way of thinking. At present, I will make no inquiry into that matter, beyond the account which he has given of it himself in the following letter, which I lately received from his own dear hands:

London, August 9, 1740

My dear Brother,

I thank you for yours, May the 24th. The case is quite plain. There are bigots both for predestination and against it. God is sending a message to those on either side. But neither will receive it unless it is from one who is of their own opinion. Therefore, for a time you are allowed to be of one opinion, and I of another. But when his time is

come, God will do what man cannot, namely, make us both of one mind. Then persecution will flame out, and it will be seen whether we count our lives dear to ourselves, so that we may finish our course with joy.

I am, my dearest brother,

Ever yours,

J. WESLEY

Thus my honoured friend, I heartily pray to God to hasten the time, for his being clearly enlightened into all the doctrines of divine revelation, that we may thus be closely united in principle and judgment, as well as heart and affection. And then if the Lord should call us to it, I do not care if I go with him to prison, or to death. For like Paul and Silas, I hope we shall sing praises to God, and count it our highest honour to suffer for Christ's sake, and to lay down our lives for the brethren.

WHITEFIELD'S LETTER TO WESLEY

Bethesda in Georgia, Dec. 24, 1740

Reverend and very dear Brother,

God only knows what unspeakable sorrow of heart I have felt on your account since I left England last. Whether it is my infirmity or not, I frankly confess, that Jonah could not go with more reluctance against Nineveh, than I now take pen in hand to write against you. If nature was to speak, I would rather die than do it; and yet if I am faithful to God, and to my own and others' souls, I must not stand neutral any longer. I am very apprehensive that our common adversaries will rejoice to see us differing among ourselves. But what can I say? The children of God are in danger of falling into error. No, indeed numbers *have* been misled, whom God has been pleased to work upon by my ministry; and a greater number are still calling aloud upon me to also show my opinion. I must then show that I know no man after the flesh, and that I have no partiality,^{Jas 2.9} any further than is consistent with my duty to my Lord and Master, *Jesus Christ*.

This letter, no doubt, will lose me many friends: and for this cause perhaps God has laid this difficult task upon me — even to see whether I am willing to forsake all for him, or not. From such considerations as these, I think it my duty to bear a humble testimony, and to earnestly plead for the truths which I am convinced are clearly revealed in the Word of God. In the defence of it, I must use great plainness of speech, and treat my dearest friends on earth with the greatest simplicity, faithfulness, and freedom, leaving the consequences of all to God.

For some time before, and especially since my last departure from England, both in public and private, by preaching and printing, you have been propagating the doctrine of *universal redemption*. And when I remember how Paul reproved Peter for his dissimulation, I fear I have been sinfully silent too long. O then do not be angry with me, dear and honoured Sir, if I now deliver my soul by telling you that I think you greatly err in this.

It is not my design to enter into a long debate on God's decrees. I refer you to Dr. Edwards' work, *Veritas Redux*,² which, I think is unanswerable — except in a certain point, concerning a *middle sort* between elect and reprobate,³ which in effect he afterwards condemns.

I will only make a few remarks upon your sermon, entitled *Free Grace*. And before I enter upon the discourse itself, let me take note briefly of what in your Preface you say is an indispensable obligation to make it public to all the world. I must admit that I always thought you were quite mistaken on that point.

The case (you know) stands thus: When you were at Bristol, I think you received a letter from a private hand, charging you with not preaching the gospel, because you did not preach election. On this you drew a lot:⁴ the answer was "*preach and print*." I have often questioned, as I do now, whether in doing so, you did not tempt the Lord. A due exercise of religious prudence, without drawing a lot, would have directed you in that matter. Besides, I never heard that you enquired of God whether or not election was a gospel doctrine.

But, I fear, taking it for granted that it was not, you only enquired whether you should be silent, or preach and print against it.

However this may be, the lot came out to "*preach and print*"; accordingly you preached and printed *against* election. At my desire, you suppressed publishing the sermon while I was in England; but you soon sent it into the world after my departure. O that you had kept it in! However, if that sermon was printed in answer to a lot, I am apt to think that one reason why God would so allow you to be deceived, was that hereby a special obligation might be laid upon me to faithfully declare the Scripture doctrine of election; and that thus the Lord might give me a fresh opportunity to see what was in my heart, and whether I would be true to his cause or not; as you could only grant that he did once before, by giving you another such lot at Deal.⁵

The morning I sailed from Deal for Gibraltar,⁶ you arrived from Georgia. Instead of giving me an opportunity to converse with you, even though the ship was not far off shore, you drew a lot, and immediately set off to London. You left a letter behind with words to this effect: "When I saw that God, by the wind which was carrying you out, brought me in, I asked the counsel of God. His answer you have enclosed." This was a piece of paper in which were written these words, "Let him return to London."

When I received this, I was somewhat surprised. Here was a good man telling me he had cast a lot, and that God would have me return to London. On the other hand, I knew my call was to Georgia, and that I had

taken leave of London, and could not justly go from the soldiers who were committed to my charge. I took myself to prayer with a friend. That passage in 1Kings 13 was powerfully impressed upon my soul, where we are told that the Prophet was slain by a lion when he was tempted to go back (contrary to God's express order) upon another Prophet's telling him that God would have him do so. I wrote you word that I could not return to London. We sailed immediately.

Some months after, I received a letter from you at Georgia, in which you wrote to this effect: "Though God never before gave me a wrong lot, yet perhaps he allowed me to have such a lot at that time, to test what was in your heart." I would never have published this private transaction to the world if the glory of God did not call me to it. It is plain you had a wrong lot given to you here, and justly so, because you tempted God in drawing one. And thus I believe it is in the present case. And if so, do not let the children of God, who are your intimate friends and mine, and also advocates for *universal redemption*, think that this doctrine is true — just because you preached it in compliance with a lot given from God.

This, I think, may serve as an answer to that part of the Preface to your printed sermon, in which you say, "Nothing but the strongest conviction, not only that what is advanced here is the truth as it is in Jesus, but also that I am indispensably obliged to declare this truth to all the world." That you believe what you have written to be truth, and that you honestly aim at God's glory in writing, I do not doubt in the least. But then, honoured Sir, I can only think you have been greatly mistaken in imagining that your tempting God, by casting a lot in the way you did, could lay you under an *indispensable obligation* to any action, much less to publish your sermon against the doctrine of *predestination to life*.

I must next observe, that as you have been unhappy in printing at all upon such an *imaginary warrant*, so you have been as unhappy in the choice of your text. Honoured Sir, how could it enter into your heart to choose a text to disprove the doctrine of election out of Romans 8, where this doctrine is so plainly asserted? Once I spoke with a Quaker on this subject, and he had no other way of evading the force of the Apostle's assertion than by saying, "I believe Paul was in the wrong." And another friend recently (who was once highly prejudiced against election), ingenuously confessed that he too used to think St. Paul himself was mistaken, or that he was not accurately translated.

Indeed, honoured Sir, it is plain beyond all contradiction that St. Paul, through the whole of Romans 8, is speaking of the privileges of those alone who are really in Christ. And let any unprejudiced person read what goes before and what follows your text, and he must confess the word “all” only signifies those that are in Christ. And the latter part of the text plainly proves what I find that dear Mr. Wesley will by no means grant. I mean the *final perseverance* of the children of God: “He that did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, [*i.e.*, all the Saints] how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32) — give us grace, in particular, to enable us to persevere, and everything else necessary to carry us home to our Father’s heavenly kingdom.

If anyone had a mind to prove the doctrine of *election*, as well as *final perseverance*, he could hardly wish for a text more fit for his purpose than that which you have chosen to disprove it! One who did not know you, would suspect that you were aware of this; for after the first paragraph, I scarcely know whether you have mentioned the text so much as once throughout your whole sermon.

But your discourse, in my opinion, is as little to the purpose as your text; and instead of turning me, it only more and more confirms me in the belief of the doctrine of God’s *eternal election*.

I will not mention how illogically you have proceeded. If you had written clearly, you would first, honoured Sir, have proved your proposition: “God’s grace is free to all.” And then by way of inference, you would have argued against what you call *the horrible decree*. But you knew (because *Arminianism*, as of late, has so abounded among us) that people were generally prejudiced against the doctrine of *reprobation*; and therefore you thought that if you kept up their dislike of that, you could overthrow the doctrine of election entirely. For without a doubt, the doctrine of *election* and *reprobation* must stand or fall together.

But passing by this — and also your equivocal definition of the word *grace*, and your false definition of the word *free* — and so that I may be as brief as possible, I frankly acknowledge that I believe the ***Doctrine of Reprobation*** in this view:

That God intends to give saving grace through Jesus Christ only to a certain number; and that the rest of mankind, after the fall of Adam, being justly left by God to continue in sin, will at last suffer that eternal death which is its proper wages.

This is the established doctrine of Scripture, and it is acknowledged as such in the 17th article of the Church of England, as Bishop Burnet himself confesses. Yet dear Mr. Wesley absolutely denies it.

But the most important objections you have urged against this doctrine, as reasons why you reject it — being seriously considered, and faithfully tried by the Word of God — will appear to have no force at all. Let the matter be humbly and calmly reviewed, as to the following points:

First, you say that if this is so (*i.e.*, if there is an election) then all preaching is in vain: it is needless for those who are elected, for whether with preaching or without, they will be infallibly saved. Therefore the end of preaching, to save souls, is void with regard to them. And it is useless for those who are not elected for they cannot possibly be saved. Whether with preaching or without, they will infallibly be damned. The end of preaching is therefore likewise void with regard to them. So that in either case, our preaching is in vain, and your hearing is also in vain. [Page 10, paragraph 9.](#)

O dear Sir, what kind of reasoning — or rather sophistry — this is! Has not God, who has appointed salvation for a certain number, also appointed the preaching of the Word as a *means* to bring them to it? Does anyone hold election in any other sense? And if so, how is preaching needless for those who are elected, when the gospel is designated by God himself to be the power of God unto their eternal salvation? [Rom 1.16](#) And since we do not know who are elect and who are reprobate, we are to preach promiscuously to *all*. For the Word may be useful, even to the non-elect, in restraining them from much wickedness and sin. However, it is enough to excite us to the utmost diligence in preaching and hearing, when we consider that by these means, some — even as many as the Lord has ordained to eternal life — shall *certainly* be quickened and enabled to believe. And whoever attends to this, especially with reverence and care, who can tell whether he may not be found among that happy number?

Second, you say that the doctrine of election and reprobation tends to directly destroy holiness, which is the end of all the ordinances of God. “For” (says the dear mistaken Mr. Wesley) “it wholly takes away those first motives to follow after it, so frequently proposed in Scripture: the hope of future reward and fear of punishment, the hope of heaven and fear of hell,” etc.⁷

I thought that one who carries perfection to such an exalted pitch as dear

Mr. Wesley does, would know that a true lover of the Lord Jesus Christ would strive to be holy for the sake of being holy, and work for Christ out of love and gratitude, without any regard for the rewards of heaven or fear of hell. You remember, dear Sir, what Scougal⁸ says, “Love’s a more powerful motive that moves them.”

But passing by this, and granting that rewards and punishments (as they certainly are) may be motives from which a Christian may be honestly stirred up to act for God, *how does the doctrine of election destroy these motives?* Do the elect not know that the more good works they do, the greater their reward will be? And is that not encouragement enough to set them upon, and cause them to persevere in, working for Jesus Christ?

And *how does the doctrine of election destroy holiness?* Who ever preached any other election than what the Apostle preached when he said, “Chosen... through *sanctification* of the Spirit?” (2Thes. 2:13). Indeed, is holiness not made a mark of our election by all who preach it? And how then can the doctrine of election destroy holiness?

The instance which you bring to illustrate your assertion, indeed, dear Sir, is quite impertinent.⁹ For you say, “If a sick man knows that he must unavoidably die or unavoidably recover, though he knows not which, it is not reasonable to take any medicine at all.”¹⁰ Dear Sir, what absurd reasoning is here? Were you ever sick in your life? If so, did not the bare probability or possibility of your recovering, even though you knew it was unalterably fixed that you must live or die, encourage you to take medicine? For how did you know that *that* very medicine might not be the means God intended to recover you by?

This is just as it is with the ***Doctrine of Election***. I know that it is unalterably fixed (one may say) that I must be damned or saved; but since I do not know which for certain, why should I not strive, even though at present I am in a state of nature, since I do not know if this striving may not be the means God has intended to bless me, in order to bring me into a state of grace?

Dear Sir, consider these things. Make an impartial application, and then judge what little reason you had to conclude the [10th paragraph, page 12](#), with these words: “Thus this doctrine directly tends to shut the very gate of holiness in general, to hinder unholy men from ever approaching it, or striving to enter it.”

“Just as directly,” you say, “this doctrine tends to destroy several particular branches of holiness, such as meekness, love,” etc.¹¹ I shall say little, dear Sir, in answer to this paragraph. Dear Mr. Wesley perhaps has been disputing with some warm narrow-spirited men who held election, and then he infers that their warmth and narrowness of spirit was owing to their principles? But does not dear Mr. Wesley know many dear children of God, who are predestinarians, and yet are meek, lowly, merciful, courteous, tender-hearted, kind, of a catholic spirit, and hope to see the most vile and profligate of men converted? And why? Because they know God saved themselves by an act of his electing love, and they do not know whether he may not have elected those who now seem to be the most abandoned.

But, dear Sir, we must not judge the truth of principles in general, nor this of election in particular, entirely from the practice of some who profess to hold them. If so, I am sure much might be said against your own. For I appeal to your own heart, whether or not you have felt in yourself, or observed in others, a narrow-spiritedness, and some disunion of soul respecting those that hold *universal redemption*. If so, then according to your own rule, *universal redemption* is *wrong*, because it destroys several branches of holiness, such as meekness, love, etc. But not to insist upon this, I beg that you would observe that your inference is entirely set aside by the force of the Apostle’s argument, and the language which he expressly uses in Colossians 3:12-13: “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man has a quarrel against anyone: even as Christ forgave you, so also do.”

Here we see that the Apostle exhorts them to put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, etc., upon this consideration: namely, *because they were elect of God*. And all who have experientially felt this doctrine in their hearts, feel that these graces are the genuine effects of their being elected of God.

But perhaps dear Mr. Wesley may be mistaken in this point, and calls it “passion” which is only zeal for God’s truths. You know, dear Sir, the Apostle exhorts us to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Therefore you must not condemn all that appear zealous for the doctrine of election as narrow-spirited, or persecutors,

just because they think it is their duty to oppose you. I am sure that I love you in the tenderness of Jesus Christ, and think I could lay down my life for your sake; yet, dear Sir, I cannot help strenuously opposing your errors on this important subject, because I think you warmly, though not designedly, oppose the truth, as it is in Jesus. May the Lord remove the scales of prejudice from the eyes of your mind and give you a zeal according to true Christian knowledge!

Third, says your sermon, “This doctrine tends to destroy the comforts of religion, the happiness of Christianity, etc.”¹²

But how does Mr. Wesley know this, who never believed election? I believe those who have experienced it will agree with our 17th article, that the godly consideration of predestination, and election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and those who feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing their minds to high and heavenly things, because it greatly establishes and confirms their faith of eternal salvation, to be enjoyed through Christ, and because it fervently kindles their love towards God,” etc..

This plainly shows that our godly reformers did not think election destroyed holiness or the comforts of religion. As for my own part, this doctrine is my daily support. I would utterly sink under a dread of my impending trials, if I were not firmly persuaded that God has chosen me in Christ from before the foundation of the world, and that now being effectually called, he will allow no one to pluck me out of his almighty hand.^{Joh 10.28}

You proceed thus: “This is evident as to all those who believe themselves to be reprobate, or only suspect or fear it; all the great and precious promises are lost to them; they afford them no ray of comfort.”¹³

In answer to this, let me observe that none living, especially none who are desirous of salvation, can know that they are not of the number of God’s elect. None but the unconverted can have any just reason so much as to fear it. And would you, dear Mr. Wesley, give comfort, or dare you apply the precious promises of the gospel, being children’s bread,^{Mar 7.27} to men in a natural state, while they continue as such? God forbid! What if the doctrine of election and reprobation *does* put some to doubting? So does regeneration. But is this doubting not a good means to put them to

searching and striving? And is that striving not a good means to make their calling and election sure? [2Pet 1.10](#)

This is one reason among many others why I admire the doctrine of election, and why I am convinced that it should have a place in gospel ministrations, and should be insisted on with faithfulness and care. It has a natural tendency to rouse the soul out of its carnal security. And therefore many carnal men cry out against it. Whereas universal redemption, sadly, is a notion adapted to keep the soul in its lethargic, sleepy condition; and therefore so many natural men admire and applaud it.

Your 13th, 14th and 15th paragraphs come next to be considered.¹⁴ “The witness of the Spirit,” you say, “experience shows to be greatly obstructed by this doctrine.”¹⁵

But, dear Sir, *whose* experience? Not your own; for in your journal, from your embarking for Georgia to your return to London, you seem to acknowledge that you do not have it, and therefore you are no competent judge in this matter. You must mean then the experience of others. For you say in the same paragraph, “Even in those who have tasted of that good gift, who yet have soon lost it again,” (I suppose you mean lost the sense of it again) “and fallen back into doubts and fears and darkness, even horrible darkness that might be felt,” etc. Now, as to the darkness of desertion, was this not the case of Jesus Christ himself, after he had received an unmeasurable unction of the Holy Ghost? Was his soul not exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death, in the garden? [Mat 26.38](#) And was he not surrounded with a horrible darkness, even a darkness that might be felt, when on the cross he cried out, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” [Mat 27.46](#)

And is it not evident from Scripture that all his followers are liable to the same thing? For, the Apostle says, “He was tempted in all things, as we are” (Heb 4:15) so that he himself might be able to succour those who are tempted (Heb. 2:18). And is not their liableness to it consistent with that conformity to him in suffering, which his members are to bear (Phil. 3:10)? Why then should persons falling into darkness, after they have received the witness of the Spirit, be any argument against the doctrine of election?

“Yet,” you say, “many, very many of those that do not hold it, in all parts

of the earth, have enjoyed the uninterrupted witness of the Spirit, the continual light of God's countenance, from the moment in which they first believed, for many months or years, to this very day." ¹⁶ But how does dear Mr. Wesley know this? Has he consulted the experience of many, very many, in all parts of the earth? Or if he could be sure of what he has advanced without sufficient grounds, would it follow that their being kept in this light is owing to their not believing the doctrine of election? No, this doctrine, according to the sentiments of our church, "greatly confirms and establishes a true Christian's faith of eternal salvation through Christ," and is an anchor of hope, both sure and steadfast, when he walks in darkness and sees no light; as certainly he may, even after he has received the witness of the Spirit, whatever you or others may unadvisedly assert to the contrary.

Then, to have respect toward God's everlasting covenant, and to throw himself upon the free distinguishing love of that God who does not change, will make him lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees. [Heb 12.12](#)

But without the belief of the doctrine of election, and the immutability of the free love of God, I cannot see how it is possible that anyone should have a comfortable assurance of eternal salvation. What could it signify to a man whose conscience is thoroughly awakened, and who is warned in good earnest to seek deliverance from the wrath to come, even though he should be assured that all his past sins are forgiven, and that he is now a child of God — if notwithstanding this, he may afterward become a child of the devil, and be thrown into hell at last? Could such an assurance yield any solid, lasting comfort to a person convinced of the corruption and treachery of his own heart, and of the malice, subtlety, and power of Satan? No! That which alone deserves the name of a full assurance of faith, is such an assurance that it *emboldens* the believer, under the sense of his interest in distinguishing love, to challenge all his adversaries, whether men or devils, with regard to all their future as well as present attempts to destroy — saying with the Apostle,

Who will lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is *God* that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is *Christ* that died, yes rather, who has risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or

peril, or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. No, indeed, in all these things we are *more than conquerors* through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:33-39).

This, dear Sir, is the triumphant language of every soul that has attained a full assurance of faith. And this assurance can only arise from a belief of God's electing, everlasting love. That many have an assurance they are in Christ today, but take no thought for, or are not assured that, they will be in him tomorrow — no, *to all eternity* — is their imperfection and unhappiness rather than their privilege. I pray to God to bring all such persons to a sense of his eternal love, so that they may no longer build upon their own faithfulness, but upon the unchangeableness of that God whose gifts and callings are without repentance. For those whom God has once justified, he will also glorify. [Rom 8.30](#)

I observed before, dear Sir, that it is not always a safe rule to judge the truth of principles from people's practice. And therefore, supposing that all who hold *universal redemption* in your way of explaining it, after they received faith and enjoyed the continual uninterrupted sight of God's countenance — it does not follow from this, that this is a fruit of their principle. For *that*, I am sure, has a natural tendency to keep the soul in darkness forever; because the creature is thereby taught that his being *kept* in a state of salvation, is owing to his own free will. And what a sandy foundation that is for a poor creature to build his hopes of perseverance upon! Every relapse into sin, every surprise by temptation, must throw him “into doubts and fears, into horrible darkness, even darkness that may be felt.”¹⁷

Hence it is, that the letters which have been sent to me lately by those who hold universal redemption, are dead and lifeless, dry and inconsistent, in comparison to those I receive from persons on the contrary side. Those who settle in the universal scheme, even though they might begin in the Spirit (whatever they may say to the contrary), are ending in the flesh, and building up a righteousness that is founded on their own free will: while the others triumph in hope of the glory of God, and build upon God's never-failing promise and unchangeable love, even

when his sensible presence is withdrawn from them.

But I would not judge the truth of election by the experience of any particular persons: if I did (O bear with me in this foolish boasting)^{2Cor 11.16} I think I myself might glory in election. For these five or six years I have received the witness of God's Spirit; since then — blessed be God — I have not doubted a quarter of an hour of having a saving interest in Jesus Christ: but with grief and humble shame, I acknowledge that I have fallen into sin often since then. Though I do not — *dare not* — allow any one transgression,^{Rom 7.19} yet up to now I have not been (nor do I expect that while I am in this present world I ever shall be) able to live one day perfectly free from all defects and sin. And since the Scriptures declare that there is not a just man on earth (no, not among those of the highest attainments in grace) who does good and does not sin (Eccl. 7:20), we are sure that this will be the case of *all* the children of God.

The universal experience and acknowledgement of this among the godly in every age, is abundantly sufficient to confute the error of those who hold in an absolute sense, that after a man is born again he cannot commit sin. Especially since the Holy Spirit condemns the persons who say they have no sin as deceiving themselves, as being destitute of the truth, and as making God a liar (1Joh. 1:8, 10). I have also been in heaviness through manifold temptations, and I expect to be often so before I die. Thus were the Apostles and primitive Christians themselves; thus was Luther, that man of God who, as far as I can find, did not (peremptorily, at least) hold to election; and the great John Arndt¹⁸ was in the utmost perplexity, but a quarter of an hour before he died — and yet he was no predestinarian.

And if I must speak freely, I believe your fighting so strenuously against the doctrine of election, and pleading so vehemently for a sinless perfection, are among the reasons or culpable causes why you are kept out of the liberties of the gospel; and from that full assurance of faith which those enjoy who have experientially tasted, and daily feed upon God's electing, everlasting love.

But perhaps you may say that Luther and Arndt were no Christians, or at least they were very weak ones. I know you think little of Abraham, though he was eminently called the friend of God: and, I believe, also of David, the man after God's own heart. No wonder, therefore, that in a letter you sent me not long ago, you would tell me that no Baptist or

Presbyterian writer whom you have read knew anything of the liberties of Christ. What? Neither Bunyan, Henry, Flavel, Halyburton, nor any of the New England and Scots divines? See, dear Sir, what narrow-spiritedness and lack of charity arise from your principles; so then, do not cry out against election any more on account of its being “destructive of meekness and love.”

Fourth, I will now proceed to another topic. Says the dear Mr. Wesley, “How uncomfortable a thought this is, that thousands and millions of men, without any preceding offence or fault of theirs, were unchangeably doomed to everlasting burnings?”

But who ever asserted, that thousands and millions of men, *without any preceding offence or fault of theirs*, were unchangeably doomed to everlasting burnings? Do those who believe God’s dooming men to everlasting burnings, not also believe that God looked at them as men fallen in Adam? And that the decree which ordained the punishment, first regarded the crime by which it was deserved? How then are they doomed without any preceding fault? Surely Mr. Wesley will admit God’s justice in imputing Adam’s sin to his posterity. And also, after Adam fell, and his posterity fell in him, God might justly have passed them *all* by, without sending his own Son to be a saviour for *anyone*. Unless you heartily agree to both these points, you do not believe original sin correctly. If you do admit them, then you must acknowledge the doctrine of election and reprobation are highly just and reasonable. For if God might justly impute Adam’s sin to all, and afterwards have passed by all, then he might justly pass by *some*. On the right hand or on the left, you are reduced to an inextricable dilemma. And if you would be consistent, you must either give up the doctrine of the imputation of Adam’s sin, or else receive the amiable doctrine of election with a holy and righteous reprobation as its consequent. For whether you can believe it or not, the Word of God abides faithful: “The elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Rom. 11:7).

I will pass over your [17th paragraph, page 16](#). What was said on the 9th and 10th paragraphs, with a little alteration, will answer it. I will only say that it is the doctrine of election that most presses me to abound in good works.¹⁹ I am willing to suffer all things for the elect’s sake. This makes me preach with comfort, because I know salvation does not depend on man’s free will, but the Lord makes us willing in the day of his power, and

he can make use of me to bring some of his elect home, when and where he pleases.

But, **Fifth**, you say, “This doctrine has a direct manifest tendency to overthrow the whole Christian revelation. For,” you say, “supposing there is an eternal, unchangeable decree, one part of mankind *must* be saved, as though the Christian revelation were not in existence.”²⁰

But, dear Sir, how does that follow? It is only by the Christian revelation that we are acquainted with God’s design of saving his church by the death of his Son. Indeed, it is settled in the everlasting covenant that this salvation shall be applied to the elect through the knowledge and faith of him. As the prophet says in Isaiah 53:11, “*By his knowledge* my righteous servant shall justify many.” How then has the doctrine of election a direct tendency to overthrow the whole Christian revelation? Who ever thought that God’s declaration to Noah, that seed-time and harvest should never cease, could afford an argument for the neglect of plowing or sowing? Or that the unchangeable purpose of God — that the harvest should not fail — rendered the heat of the sun, or the influence of the heavenly bodies, unnecessary to produce it? Neither does God’s absolute purpose of saving his chosen preclude the necessity of the gospel revelation, or the use of any of the means through which he has determined the decree shall take effect. Nor will the right understanding, or the reverent belief of God’s decree, ever allow or suffer a Christian in any case to separate the means from the end, or the end from the means.

And since we are taught by the revelation itself that this was intended and given by God as a means of bringing home his elect, we therefore receive it with joy, prize it highly, use it in faith, and endeavour to spread it through all the world, in the full assurance that wherever God sends it, sooner or later it will be savingly useful to all the elect within its call.

How then, in holding this doctrine, do we join with modern unbelievers in making the Christian revelation unnecessary? No, dear Sir, you are mistaken. Infidels of all kinds are on *your* side of the question. Deists, Arians, and Socinians arraign God’s sovereignty and stand up for universal redemption. I pray to God that dear Mr. Wesley’s sermon, as it has grieved the hearts of many of God’s children, may *not* also strengthen the hands of many of his most avowed enemies!

Here I could almost lie down and weep. “Do not tell it in Gath; do not publish it in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines

rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph” (2 Sam. 1:20).²¹

Further, you say, “This doctrine makes revelation contradict itself.” For instance, you say,

“The assertors of this doctrine interpret that text of Scripture, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated,’ as implying that God, in a literal sense, hated Esau and all the reprobates from eternity!”²²

Yet, when considered as fallen in Adam, were they *not* objects of his hatred? And might not God, of his own good pleasure, love or show mercy to Jacob and the elect — and yet at the same time, do the reprobate no wrong? But you say, “God is love.” And can God *not be* love, unless he shows the same mercy to *all*?

Again, says dear Mr. Wesley,

“They infer from that text, ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,’ that God is merciful only to *some* men, viz., *the elect*; and that he has mercy for those only — flat contrary to which is the whole tenor of the Scripture, as is this express declaration in particular, ‘The Lord is loving to every man, and his mercy is over all his works.’”²³

And so it is, but not his *saving* mercy. God is loving to every man: he sends his rain upon the evil and upon the good.^{Mat 5:45} But you say, “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). No! For every one, whether Jew or Gentile, that believes on Jesus, and works righteousness, is accepted by him. “But he that does not believe shall be damned” (Mk. 16:16). For God is no respecter of persons on account of any outward condition or circumstance in life whatsoever; nor does the doctrine of election in the least suppose him to be so. But as the sovereign Lord of all, who is debtor to none, he has a right to do what he will with his own; and to dispense his favours to what objects he sees fit, merely at his pleasure. And his supreme right in this is clearly and strongly asserted in those passages of Scripture where he says, “Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Rom. 9:15, Exod. 33:19).

Further, from the text, “the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calls; it was said to her [Rebekah], The elder shall serve the younger” (Rom. 9:11-12) — you represent us as

inferring that our predestination to life in no way depends on the foreknowledge of God.

But who infers this, dear Sir? For if foreknowledge signifies approval, as it does in several parts of Scripture, then we confess predestination and election *do* depend on God's foreknowledge. But if by God's foreknowledge you mean God's fore-seeing some good works done by his creatures, as the foundation or reason for choosing and therefore electing them, then we say, in *this* sense, predestination does *not* in any way depend on God's foreknowledge.

But I referred you, at the beginning of this letter, to Dr. Edwards's *Veritas Redux*, which I recommended to you also in a recent letter, with Elisha Coles on *God's Sovereignty*. Be pleased to read these, and also the excellent sermons of Mr. Cooper of Boston in New England (which I also sent you), and I do not doubt that you will see all your objections answered. Though I would observe, that after all our reading on both sides of the question, we will never in this life be able to search out God's decrees to perfection. No, we must humbly adore what we cannot comprehend, and with the great Apostle, at the end of our enquiries, we must cry out, "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! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?" (Rom. 11:33-34) — or say with our Lord, when he was admiring God's sovereignty, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in your sight" (Matt. 11:26).

However, it may not be amiss to take notice that if those texts, "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9) and "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11) — and others like these — are taken in their strictest sense, then *no one* will be damned.²⁴

But here's the distinction. God takes no pleasure in the death of sinners, so as to delight simply in their death; rather, he delights to magnify his justice by inflicting the punishment which their iniquities have deserved. A righteous judge who takes no pleasure in condemning a criminal, may yet justly command him to be executed so that law and justice may be satisfied, even though it is in his power to procure him a reprieve.

I would hint further, that you unjustly charge the doctrine of *reprobation*

with blasphemy; yet it is the doctrine of *universal redemption*, as you set it forth, that is really the highest reproach on the dignity of the Son of God, and the merit of his blood. Consider whether it is not blasphemy rather to say, as you do, “Christ not only died for those who are saved, but also for those who perish.”²⁵

The text you have misapplied, to gloss over this, is explained by Ridgely, Edwards, and Henry; and I purposely omit answering your texts myself so that you may be brought to read such treatises which, under God, would show you your error. You cannot make good the assertion that Christ died for those who perish without holding that all the damned souls would hereafter be brought out of hell (as Peter Bohler, one of the Moravian brethren, in order to prove universal redemption, frankly confessed in recent a letter). I cannot think Mr. Wesley is thus minded. And yet unless this can be proved, universal redemption taken in a literal sense, falls entirely to the ground. For how can all be universally redeemed, if all are not finally saved?

Dear Sir, for Jesus Christ’s sake, consider how you dishonour God by denying election. You plainly make salvation depend not on *God’s free grace*, but on *man’s free-will*. And if that is so, then it is more than probable that Jesus Christ would not have had the satisfaction of seeing the fruit of his death in the eternal salvation of one soul.²⁶ Our preaching would then be vain, and all the invitations for people to believe in him would also be in vain.

But, blessed be God, our Lord *knew* for whom he died. There was an eternal compact between the Father and the Son. A certain number was then given him as the purchase and reward for his obedience and death. He prayed for these, and *not for the world* (Joh. 17:9). For these elect ones, and these only, he is now interceding, and with their salvation he will be fully satisfied.

I purposely omit making any further particular remarks on the several last pages of your sermon. Indeed if your name, dear Sir, had not been prefixed to the sermon, I could not have been so uncharitable as to think you were the author of such sophistry. You beg the question, in saying that God has declared (notwithstanding that you admit, I suppose, some will be damned) that he will save all — i.e., every individual person. You take it for granted (for you have no solid proof) that God is unjust if he passes by *any*; and then you decry the “*horrible decree*”: and yet, as I

hinted before, in holding to the doctrine of original sin, you profess to believe that he might justly have passed by *all*.

Dear, dear Sir, O do not be offended! For Christ's sake, do not be rash! Give yourself to reading. Study the covenant of grace. Down with your carnal reasoning. Be a little child. And then, if the doctrine of *universal redemption* is not true, instead of pawning your salvation (as you have in a recent hymn book), and instead of talking of *sinless perfection* (as you have done in the preface to that hymn book), and instead of making man's salvation depend on his *own free will*, as you have in this sermon — you will compose a hymn in praise of sovereign distinguishing love. You will caution believers against striving to work perfection out of their own hearts; and print another sermon the reverse of this, entitled "Free Grace *Indeed*." Free, not because it is free to all; but free, because God may withhold or give it to whom and when he pleases.

Till you do this, I must doubt whether you know yourself. In the meanwhile, I cannot help but blame you for censuring the clergy of our church for not keeping to their articles,²⁷ when you yourself, by your principles, positively deny the 9th, 10th and 17th articles.

Dear Sir, these things should not be so. God knows my heart, as I told you before; so I declare again, nothing but a single regard for the honour of Christ has forced this letter from me. I love and honour you for his sake; and when I come to judgment, I will thank you before men and angels for what you have, under God, done for my soul.

There, I am persuaded, I shall see dear Mr. Wesley convinced of election and everlasting love. And it often fills me with pleasure to think how I shall behold you casting your crown down at the feet of the Lamb and, as it were, filled with a holy blushing for opposing the divine sovereignty in the manner you have done.

But I hope the Lord will show you this before you go from here. O how I long for that day! If the Lord should be pleased to make use of this letter for that purpose, it would abundantly rejoice the heart of, dear and honoured Sir,

Yours affectionate, though unworthy brother and servant in Christ,

GEORGE WHITEFIELD.

Free Grace

By John Wesley

Sermon 128

(text modernized from the 1739 edition)

Source: <https://archive.org/stream/freegracesermonp00wesl#page/n1/mode/2up>

TO THE READER

Nothing but the strongest conviction — not only that what is here advanced is “the truth as it is in Jesus,” but also that I am indispensably obliged to declare this truth to all the world — could have induced me to openly oppose the sentiments of those whom I esteem for their work’s sake: At whose feet may I be found in the day of the Lord Jesus!

Should any believe that it is his duty to reply to this, I have only one request to make, Let whatever you do, be done in charity, in love, and in the spirit of meekness. Let your very disputing show that you have put on, as the elect of God, tender mercies, gentleness, longsuffering; “that even according to this time it may be said, ‘*See how these Christians love one another!*’”

[5]

“He that did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” – Romans, 8:32

1. How freely God loves the world! While we were yet sinners, “Christ died for the ungodly.”²⁸ While we were “dead in our sin,” Eph 2.5 God “did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.” And how freely with him he “gives us all things!” Truly, FREE GRACE is all in all!

2. The grace or love of God, from which our salvation comes, is FREE IN ALL, and FREE FOR ALL.

3. **FIRST. It is free in all to whom it is given.** It does not depend on any power or merit in man; no, not in any degree, either in whole or in part. It does not in any way depend either on the good

[6]

works or righteousness of the receiver: not on anything he has *done*, or anything he *is*. It does not depend on his endeavors. It does not depend on his good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and intentions — for all these flow from the free grace of God. They are the streams only, not the fountain. They are the fruits of free grace, and not the root. They

are not the cause, but the effects of it. Whatever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it. Thus his grace is free in all; that is, it in no way depends on any power or merit in man, but on God alone, who freely gave us his own Son, and “with him freely gives us all things.”

4. But it is free for ALL, as well as IN ALL. To this some have answered,

“No: It is free only for those whom God has ordained to life; and they are but a little flock. The greater part of mankind, God has ordained to death; and it is not free for them. God hates them; and therefore before they were born, he decreed they would die eternally. And this he absolutely decreed; because it was his good pleasure to do so; it was his sovereign will. Accordingly, they are born for this: to be destroyed body and soul in hell. And they grow up

[7]

under the irrevocable curse of God, without any possibility of redemption. For what grace God gives, he gives only for this: to increase, not to prevent, their damnation.”

This is that decree of predestination. But I think I hear someone say,

“This is not the predestination which I hold. I hold only the *Election of Grace*. What I believe is not more than this: that God, before the foundation of the world, elected a certain number of men to be justified, sanctified, and glorified. [Rom 8.30](#) Now, all these will be saved, and none else. For the rest of mankind God leaves to themselves. So they follow the imaginations of their own hearts, which are only evil continually, [Gen 6.5](#) and waxing worse and worse, they are at length justly punished with everlasting destruction.”

5. Is this *all* the predestination which you hold? Consider: perhaps this is *not* all. Do you not believe that God ordained them to this very thing? If so, you believe the whole Decree; you hold predestination in the full sense which has been described above. But it may be, you think you do not. Do you not then believe that God hardens

[8]

the hearts of those who perish: Do you not believe that he (literally) hardened Pharaoh’s heart; and that for this end he raised him up (or created him)? Why, this amounts to just the same thing. If you believe

Pharaoh, or any one man on earth, was created for this end — to be damned — then you hold all that has been said of predestination. And there is no need for you to add that God seconds his Decree, which is supposedly unchangeable and irresistible, by hardening the hearts of those vessels of wrath whom that Decree had beforehand fitted for destruction.

6. Well, it may be that you do not believe even this. You do not hold any decree of reprobation. You do not think that God decrees any man to be damned, nor hardens and irresistibly fits him for damnation. You only say,

“God eternally decreed that all being dead in sin, he would say to some of the dry bones, *Live*, and to others he would not. That consequently, these should be made alive, and those should abide in death. These should glorify God by their salvation, and those by their destruction.”

7. Is this not what you mean by *the Election of Grace*? If it is, I would ask one

[9]

or two questions. Are any who are *not* thus elected, saved? Or were *any*, from the foundation of the world? Is it possible for any man to be saved *unless* he is thus elected? If you say, “No,” you are but where you were. You have not gotten one hair’s breadth further. You still believe that in consequence of an unchangeable, irresistible decree of God, the greater part of mankind abides in death, without any possibility of redemption — inasmuch as none can save them but God, and he will not save them. You believe he has absolutely decreed *not* to save them. And what is this if not decreeing to *damn* them? It is, in effect, neither more nor less; it comes to the same thing. For if you are dead, and altogether unable to make yourself alive, then if God has absolutely decreed, he will make only others alive, and not you, he has absolutely decreed your everlasting death; you are absolutely consigned to damnation. So then, though you use softer words than some, you mean the self-same thing. And God’s decree concerning the election of grace, according to your own account of it, amounts to neither more nor less than what others call “God’s decree of reprobation.”

[10]

8. Call it therefore by whatever name you please, whether election,

preterition, predestination, or reprobation, it comes in the end to the same thing. The sense of all is plainly this:

“by virtue of an eternal, unchangeable, irresistible decree of God, one part of mankind is infallibly saved, and the rest infallibly damned: it being impossible that any of the former should be damned, or that any of the latter should be saved.”

9. But if this is so, then all preaching is in vain. It is needless for those who are elected: whether with preaching or without, they will infallibly be saved. Therefore the end of preaching — to save souls — is void with regard to them. And it is useless for those who are not elected, for they cannot possibly be saved: whether with preaching or without, they will infallibly be damned. The end of preaching is therefore void with regard to them likewise; so that in either case, our preaching is in vain, and your hearing is also in vain.

10. This then is a plain proof that the doctrine of predestination is not a doctrine of God, because it makes void the ordinance of God; and God is not divided against himself.

[11]

A **SECOND** proof is that it directly tends to destroy that holiness which is the end of all the ordinances of God. I do not say that none who hold to it are holy (for God is of tender mercy to those who are unavoidably entangled in errors of any kind). But the doctrine itself — that every man is either elected or not elected from eternity, and that the one must inevitably be saved, and the other inevitably damned — has a manifest tendency to destroy holiness in general. For it wholly takes away those first motives to follow after it, so frequently proposed in Scripture: the hope of future reward and fear of punishment, the hope of heaven and fear of hell. That these shall go away into everlasting punishment, and those into life eternal, is not a motive for someone to struggle for life, who believes his lot is cast already. It is not reasonable for him to do so if he thinks he is unalterably adjudged either to life or death. You will say, “But he does not know whether it is life or death.” What then? This does not help the matter; for if a sick man knows that he must unavoidably die, or unavoidably recover, even though he knows not which, it is unreasonable for him to take any medicine at all. He might justly say (and so I have heard some speak, both in bodily sickness and in spiritual),

[12]

“If I am ordained to life, I shall live; if to death, I shall die. So I need not trouble myself about it.” Thus this doctrine directly tends to shut the very gate of holiness in general, to hinder unholy men from ever approaching it, or striving to enter through it.

11. Just as directly, this doctrine tends to destroy several particular branches of holiness. Such are meekness and love: love, I mean, of our enemies, of those who are evil and unthankful. I am not saying that none who hold it have meekness and love (for as is the power of God, so is his mercy); but that it naturally tends to inspire or increase a sharpness or eagerness of temper, which is quite contrary to the meekness of Christ, as then it especially appears when they are opposed on this point. And it as naturally inspires contempt or coldness towards those whom we suppose are outcast from God. But you say, “O, I assume no particular man is a reprobate.” You mean you would not if you could help it. You can’t help sometimes applying your general doctrine to particular persons. The enemy of souls will apply it for you. You know how often he has done so: “But you rejected the thought with abhorrence.”

[13]

True; as soon as you could. But how did it sour and sharpen your spirit in the mean time? You well know, it was not the spirit of love which you then felt towards that poor sinner, whom you supposed or suspected (whether you would or not) to have been hated by God from eternity.

12. **THIRDLY.** This doctrine tends to destroy the comfort of religion, the *happiness* of Christianity. This is evident with regard to all those who believe themselves to be reprobated, or who only suspect or fear it. All the great and precious promises are lost to them; they afford them no ray of comfort: For they are not the elect of God; therefore they have neither lot nor portion in them. This is an effectual bar to their finding any comfort or happiness even in that religion whose ways are designed to be “ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace.” [Pro 3.17](#)

13. And as for you who believe yourselves to be the elect of God, what is your happiness? I hope not a notion, a speculative belief, or a bare opinion of any kind; but a feeling possession of God in your heart, wrought in you by the Holy Ghost; or the witness of God’s Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God. [Rom 8.16](#) This, otherwise termed

[14]

“the full assurance of faith,” is the true ground of a Christian’s happiness. And it does indeed imply a full assurance that all your past sins are forgiven, and that you are *now* a child of God. But it does not necessarily imply a full assurance of our future perseverance. I do not say this is never joined to it, but that it is not necessarily implied in it; for many have the one who do not have the other.

14. Now, experience shows that this witness of the Spirit is greatly obstructed by this doctrine; and not only in those who, believing themselves reprobated by this belief, thrust it far from them, but even in those who have *tasted of that good gift*, [Heb 6.4](#) who yet have soon lost it again, and fallen back into doubts, and fears, and darkness, even *horrible darkness that might be felt!* And I appeal to any of you who hold this doctrine, to say between God and your own hearts, whether you do not often have a return of doubts and fears concerning your election or perseverance? If you ask, “Who has not?” I answer, Very few of those who hold this doctrine; but many, very many of those who do not hold it, in all parts of the earth; many of those who know and feel they are in Christ today, and *take no thought for the morrow*; who

[15]

abide in him by Faith from hour to hour, or rather from moment to moment. Many of these have enjoyed the uninterrupted Witness of the Spirit, the continual Light of his Countenance from the moment in which they first believed, for many months or years, to this very day.

15. That assurance of faith which these people enjoy, excludes all doubt and fear. It excludes all kinds of doubt and fear concerning their future perseverance; though it is not properly (as was said before) an assurance of what is future, but only of what *now* is. And this does not need for its support, a speculative belief that whoever is once ordained to life must live; for it is wrought from hour to hour by the mighty power of God, “by the Holy Ghost which is given to them.” [Rom 5.5](#) And therefore that doctrine is not of God, because it tends to obstruct, if not destroy, this great work of the Holy Ghost from which flows the chief comfort of religion, the happiness of Christianity.

16. Again, how uncomfortable a thought is this: that thousands and millions of men, without any preceding offense or fault of theirs, were unchangeably doomed to everlasting burnings? How peculiarly uncomfortable it must be to those who have

[16]

put on Christ! To those who, being filled with a heart of mercy, tenderness, and compassion, could even “wish themselves accursed for their brethren’s sake!” [Rom 9.3](#)

17. **FOURTHLY.** This uncomfortable doctrine directly tends to destroy our zeal for good works. And this it does *First*, as it naturally tends (according to what was observed before) to destroy our love for the greater part of mankind, namely, the evil and unthankful. For whatever lessens our love, must so far lessen our desire to do them good. This it does, *Secondly*, as it cuts off one of the strongest motives to all acts of bodily mercy, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and the like, viz., the hope of saving their souls from death. For what does it avail to relieve the temporal wants of those who are just dropping into eternal fire? “Well; only run and snatch them as brands out of the fire.” [Zec 3.2](#) No, indeed this you assume is impossible. They were appointed to it, you say, from eternity, before they had done either good or evil. You believe it is the will of God that they should die. And “who has resisted his will?” [Rom 9.19](#) But you say you do not know whether these are elected or not. What then? If you know they are one or the other, that they are either elected or not elected,

[17]

all your labour is void and in vain. In either case, your advice, reproof, or exhortation is as needless and useless as our preaching. It is needless for those who are elected; for they will infallibly be saved without it. It is useless for those who are not elected; for with or without it they will infallibly be damned; therefore you cannot consistently with your principles take any pains about their salvation. Consequently, those principles directly tend to destroy your zeal for good works — for all good works, but particularly for the greatest of all, the saving of souls from death.

18. But, **FIFTHLY**, this doctrine not only tends to destroy Christian holiness, happiness, and good works, but it also has also a direct and manifest tendency to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation. The point which the wisest of the modern unbelievers most industriously labour to prove, is that the Christian Revelation is not necessary. They well know that if they could once show this, the conclusion would be too plain to be denied: “If it is not necessary, it is not true.” Now, this

fundamental point you give up. For supposing there is an eternal, unchangeable decree, one part of mankind *must* be saved, as though the Christian Revelation were not in existence; and

[18]

the other part of mankind must be damned, notwithstanding that Revelation. And what would an infidel desire more? You allow him all he asks. In making the gospel thus unnecessary to all sorts of men, you give up the whole Christian cause. “O do not tell it in Gath! Do not publish it in the streets of Ashkelon! Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice; lest the sons of unbelief triumph!” [2Sam 1.20](#)

19. [SIXTHLY.] And as this doctrine manifestly and directly tends to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation, so it does the same thing, by plain consequence, in making that Revelation contradict itself. For it is grounded on such an interpretation of some texts (whether more or fewer, it does not matter) that it flatly contradicts all the other texts, and indeed the whole scope and tenor of Scripture. For instance: The assertors of this doctrine interpret that text of Scripture, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,” as implying that God in a literal sense hated Esau and all the reprobated, from eternity. Now what can possibly be a more flat contradiction than this, not only to the whole scope and tenor of Scripture, but also to all those particular texts which expressly declare, “God is love”? [1Joh 4.8](#) Again, they infer from that text, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,” (Romans 9:15) that

[19]

God is love only to *some* men, viz., *the elect*, and that he has mercy for those only; flat contrary to which is the whole tenor of Scripture, as is this express declaration in particular, “The Lord is loving to *every man*; and his mercy is over all his works.” (Psalm 145:9) Again, they infer from that and similar texts, “It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy,” [Rom 9.16](#) that he shows mercy only to those to whom he had respect from all eternity. No indeed, but who replies against God now? You now contradict the whole oracles of God, which declare throughout, “God is no respecter of persons,” (Acts 10:34). “There is no respect of persons with him,” (Rom. 2:11). Again, from that text, “The children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calls; it was said to her (to Rebecca), “The elder shall serve the

younger,”^{Rom 9.11-12} you infer that our being predestined or elect, in no way depends on the foreknowledge of God. Flat contrary to this are all the scriptures; and these in particular: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God,” (1Peter 1:2); “Whom he foreknew, he also predestined,” (Rom. 8:29).

[20]

20. And “the same Lord over all is rich in mercy to *all* that call upon him,” (Rom. 10:12). But you say, “No; he is such only to those for whom Christ died. And those are not all, but only a few whom God has chosen out of the world; for he did not die for all, but only for those who were ‘chosen in him before the foundation of the world,’” (Eph. 1:4). Also flat contrary to your interpretation of these scriptures, is the whole tenor of the New Testament; as are these texts in particular: “Do not destroy him with your meat, *for whom Christ died*,” (Rom. 14:15) — a clear proof that Christ died not only for those who are saved, but also for those who perish. He is “the Saviour of the *world*,” (John 4:42); He is “the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the *world*,” (John 1:29); “He is the propitiation, not for *our sins only*, but also for the sins of the *whole world*,” (1John 2:2); “He, (the living God) is the Savior of *all men*,” (1Tim. 4:10); “He gave himself a ransom *for all*,” (1Tim. 2:6); “He tasted death *for all men*” (Heb. 2:9).

[21]

21. If you ask, “Why then are not all men saved?” the whole law and the testimony answer,

First, Not because of any decree of God; not because it is his pleasure that they should die; for, “As I live, says the Lord God, I take no pleasure in the death of anyone that dies,” (Ezek. 18:32). Whatever is the cause of their perishing, it *cannot* be his will if the oracles of God are true; for they declare, “He is *not willing* that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance,” (2Pet. 3:9); “He wills that *all men* should be saved.”
^{1Tim 2.4}

And *Secondly*, they declare the reason why all men are not saved: namely, that they *will not* be saved. So our Lord says expressly, “You *will not* come to me that you may have life,” (John 5:40). “The power of the Lord is present to heal them,”^{Luk 5.17} but they *will not* be healed. “They rejected the counsel,” the *merciful* counsel, “of God against themselves,”

Luk 7.30 as did their stiff-necked forefathers. And therefore they are without excuse, because God *would* save them, but they *will not* be saved. This is the condemnation: “How often would I have gathered you together, and you *would not*,” (Matt. 23:37).

22. Thus this doctrine manifestly tends to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation, by making it contradict itself; by giving such an interpretation of some texts, that it flatly contradicts all the other texts, and indeed the whole scope and tenor of Scripture; this is an abundant proof that it is not of God.

[22]

But neither is this all: For,

SEVENTHLY, it is a doctrine full of blasphemy; such blasphemy that I should dread to mention it, except that the honour of our gracious God, and the cause of his truth, will not allow me to be silent. In the cause of God then, and from a sincere concern for the glory of his great name, I will mention a few of the horrible blasphemies contained in this horrible doctrine. But first, I must warn every one of you who hears it (for you will answer it at the great day), not to charge *me* (as some have done) with blaspheming, just because I mention the blasphemy of *others*. And the more you are grieved by those who thus blaspheme, see that you *confirm your love towards them* the more, and that your heart’s desire, and continual prayer to God is, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”Luk 23.34

23. This premised, let it be observed, that this doctrine represents our blessed Lord, “Jesus Christ the Righteous,” 1Joh 2.1 “the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth,” Joh 1.14 as an hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common sincerity. For it cannot be denied that he speaks everywhere as if he was willing that *all men* should be saved. Therefore, to say that he was not willing that all men should be saved, is to represent him as a mere hypocrite and dissembler.

[23]

It can’t be denied that the gracious words which came out of his mouth are full of invitations to *all* sinners. To say then, that he did not *intend* to save all sinners, is to represent him as a gross deceiver of the people. You cannot deny that he says, “Come to me *all you* who are weary and heavy-laden.” Mat 11.28 If then you say he calls those who *cannot* come; those

whom he knows to be *unable* to come; those whom he can *make able* to come, but *will not*; then how is it possible to describe greater insincerity? You represent him as mocking his helpless creatures by offering what he never intends to give. You describe him as saying one thing, and meaning another; as pretending the love which he did not have. Him, in “whose mouth there was no deceit,” ^{1Pet 2.22} you would make full of deceit, void of common sincerity. Then especially, when drawing near the city, He wept over it and said (Mat. 23.37), “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets, and stone those who are sent to you; how often I *would* have gathered your children together, and you *would not*;” (καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησατε — *kai ouk ethelesate*). Now if you say, **they would**, but **he would not**, you represent him (who could hear this?) as weeping crocodile’s tears; weeping over the prey which he himself had doomed to destruction.

[24]

24. This is such blasphemy that one would think it might make the ears of a Christian tingle. But there is yet more to follow; for just as it dishonours the Son, so this doctrine dishonours the Father.²⁹ It destroys all his attributes at once. It overturns his justice, mercy, and truth. Yes, it represents the most holy God as worse than the devil, as more false, more cruel, and more unjust. More *false*; because the devil, liar as he is, has never said, “He wills all men to be saved.” More *unjust*; because the devil cannot, even if he would, be guilty of such injustice as you ascribe to God, when you say that God condemned millions of souls to the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for continuing in sin which they *cannot avoid*, for lack of that grace which *he will not* give them. And more *cruel*; because that unhappy spirit “seeks rest and finds none;” ^{Mat 12.43} so that his own restless misery is a kind of temptation to him to tempt others. But God rests in his high and holy place; so that to suppose him — of his own mere motion, of his pure will and pleasure, happy as he is — to doom his creatures to endless misery, whether they will it or not, is to impute such cruelty to him that we cannot impute even to the great enemy of God and man. It is to represent the most high God (he that has ears to hear, let him hear!) as more cruel, false, and unjust than the devil.

[25]

25. This is the blasphemy clearly contained in the *horrible decree* of predestination. And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every

assertor of it. You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by scripture. Hold! *What* will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? *It cannot be*. Whatever that Scripture proves, it can never prove *this*. Whatever its true meaning is, *this* cannot be its true meaning. Do you ask, “What is its true meaning then?” If I say, “I do not know,” you have gained nothing; for there are many scriptures, the true sense of which neither you nor I shall know till death is swallowed up in victory. But this I know, it would be better to say it had no sense at all, than to say it had such a sense as *this*. It cannot mean, whatever it means besides, that the God of truth is a liar. Let it mean what it will, it cannot mean that the Judge of all the world is unjust. No scripture can mean that God is *not* love, or that his mercy is not over *all* his works.

[26]

That is, whatever it proves besides, no scripture can prove predestination.

26. This is the blasphemy for which (however I love the persons who assert it) I abhor the doctrine of predestination. It is a doctrine upon the supposition of which — if one could possibly suppose it for a moment (call it election, reprobation, or whatever you please, for it all comes to the same thing) — one might say to our adversary the devil,

“You fool, why do you roar about any longer? Your lying in wait for souls is as needless and useless as our preaching. Do you not hear that God has taken your work out of your hands; and that he does it much more effectually? You, with all your principalities and powers, can only so *assault* that we may resist you; but He can *irresistibly destroy* both body and soul in hell! [Mat 10.28](#) You can only *entice*; but his unchangeable decree — to leave thousands of souls in death — *compels* them to continue in sin till they drop into everlasting burnings. You *tempt*; but He *forces* us to be damned, for we cannot resist his will. [Rom 9.19](#) You fool, why do you go about any longer, seeking whom you may devour? [1Pet 5.8](#) Do you not hear that *God* is the devouring lion, the destroyer

[27]

of souls, the murderer of men? Moloch only caused children to pass though the fire: and *that* fire was soon quenched — or the corruptible body being consumed, its torment was at an end. But God, you are told, by his eternal decree — fixed before they had done good or evil — causes

not only children of a span long, but their parents also, to pass through the fire of hell, the ‘fire which shall never be quenched’,^{Mar 9.43} and the body which is cast into it, now being incorruptible and immortal, will be ever consuming and never consumed, but ‘the smoke of their torment,’ because it is God’s good pleasure, ‘ascends up for ever and ever.’”^{Rev 14.11}

27. O how the enemy of God and man would rejoice to hear that these things were so! How he would cry aloud and not be sparing! How he would lift up his voice and say,

“To your tents, O Israel! Flee from the face of this God, or you shall utterly perish. But to where will you flee? Into heaven? He is there. Down to hell? He is there also. You cannot flee from an omnipresent, almighty Tyrant. And whether you flee or stay, I call heaven his throne, and earth his footstool, to witness against you: you *shall* perish; you *shall* die eternally. Sing, O hell, and rejoice,

[28]

you that are under the earth! For God, even the mighty God, has spoken, and devoted to death thousands of souls, from the rising of the sun to its going down. Here, O death, is your sting! They *shall* not, *cannot* escape; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. Here, O grave, is your victory! Nations yet unborn, before they have ever done good or evil, are doomed never to see the light of life; but you shall gnaw upon them forever and ever! Let all those morning stars sing together who fell with Lucifer, son of the morning. Let all the sons of hell shout for joy! For the decree is past, and who shall disannul it?”^{Isa 14.27}

28. Yes, the decree *is* past; and so it *was* before the foundation of the world. But *what* decree? It is even this: “I will set before the sons of men ‘life and death, blessing and cursing.’ And the soul that chooses life shall live, just as the soul that chooses death shall die.”^{Deu 30.19} *This* decree by which those “whom God foreknew, he predestined,” was indeed from everlasting. *This* decree — by which all who allow Christ to make them alive, are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God”^{1Pet 4.2} — now stands fast, even as the moon, and as the faithful

[29]

witness in heaven.^{Psa 89.37} And when heaven and earth pass away, this shall not pass away;^{Mat 24.35} for it is as unchangeable and eternal as is the

being of God who gave it. *This* decree yields the strongest encouragement to abound in all good works and in all holiness; and it is a well-spring of joy, of happiness also, to our great and endless comfort. *This* is worthy of God; it is in every way consistent with all the perfections of his nature. It gives us the noblest view of his justice, mercy, and truth. To this agrees the whole scope of the Christian Revelation, as well as all its parts.

To this Moses and all the Prophets bear witness, and our blessed Lord and all his Apostles. Thus Moses prophesied in the name of his Lord: “I call heaven and earth to record against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore *choose* life, that you and your seed may live.”^{Deu 30.19} Thus prophesied Ezekiel (to cite one Prophet for all), “The soul that sins shall die: The son shall not bear (eternally) the iniquity of the father. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon *him*, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon *him*,” (Eze. 18:20). Thus said our blessed Lord: “If *any* man thirsts, let him come to me and drink,” (John 7:37). Thus said his great Apostle St. Paul, “God commands

[30]

all men everywhere to repent,” (Acts 17:30) — “all men everywhere”; every man in every place, without any exception either of place or person. Thus said St. James, “If *any* of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives *to all men* liberally, and does not upbraid, and it shall be given to him,” (James 1:5). Thus said St. Peter, “The Lord is *not willing* that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance” (2Pet. 3:9). And thus said St. John, “If *any* man sins, we have an Advocate with the Father; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of *the whole world*,” (1Joh 2:1, 2).

29. O hear this, you who forget God! You cannot charge your death upon him. “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?’ asks the Lord God,” (Ezek. 18:23ff.). “*Repent*, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions by which you have transgressed — for why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, says the Lord God. Therefore *turn*, and *live*.”^{Eze 18.32} “As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. — Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek. 33:11)

Notes

[← 1]

Wesley's Sermon has been included at the close of this letter.

[← 2]

This refers to a work by Dr. John Edwards of Cambridge, not Jonathan Edwards, the famous American pastor-theologian.

[← 3]

Reprobate: those abandoned to eternal damnation (Jer 6.30), as opposed to being elected to salvation (2Tim 2.10).

[← 4]
Or “flipped a coin.”

[← 5]

Deal is a town in Kent, England which lies on the English Channel, eight miles north-east of Dover.

[← 6]

2 February 1738.

[← 7]

Page 11, par. 10.

[← 8]

Henry Scougal (1650–1678) – Scottish theologian, minister, and professor at King’s College, Univ. of Aberdeen.

[← 9]

That is, not relevant.

[← 10]

Same place.

[← 11]

Page 12, par. 11.

[← 12]

Page 13, par. 12.

[← 13]

Same place.

[← 14]

Pages [13]-[15].

[← 15]

Page 14, par 14.

[← 16]

Same place.

[← 17]

Repeating Wesley's own sermon back to him, mentioned earlier from [page 14, par. 14.](#)

[← 18]

Johann Arndt (1555–1621) German Lutheran theologian and pietist.

[← 19]

Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. **2Pet 1:10** Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

[← 20]

Page 17, par 18.

[← 21]

Whitefield is citing Wesley in that same 18th paragraph, saying that it is *his* lament, not Wesley's.

[← 22]

Page 18, par 19.

[← 23]
Same place.

[← 24]

That is, hell would be empty.

[← 25]

Page 20, par 20.

[← 26]

Contra, **Isa 53:10** When You make His soul an offering for sin, **He shall see *His* seed.**

[← 27]

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (Anglican Church). The 9th is Original Sin; 10th Free Will; 17th Predestination and Election.

[← 28]
Rom 5.6, 8.

[← 29]

The original printing had an obvious typographical error in it saying, “just as it honours the son, so doth this doctrine honour the Father.” That would be inconsistent with “It destroys all his attributes at once.” Perhaps the typesetter was a Calvinist...