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## THE SERMONS OF JOHN BRINE

# Grace, Proved to Be at the Sovereign Disposal of God:

*by John Brine*

*(London: George Keith, 1760)*

*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;  
that it may be displayed because of the truth  
— Psa. 60: 4*



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# SERMON 31

## GRACE, PROVED TO BE AT THE SOVEREIGN DISPOSAL OF GOD:

IN A DISCOURSE PREACHED *JULY 19, 1760*, AT THE  
REVEREND MR. BURFORD'S MEETING, IN A MONTHLY  
EXERCISE OF PRAYER, WITH A SERMON.

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### DEU. 29: 4.

Yet the Lord hath not given you an Heart to perceive, Eyes to see,  
and Ears to hear unto this Day.

MOSES observes to the People of *Israel*, that they had beheld the  
miraculous Works, which God had wrought, in a way of Vengeance on  
their Enemies, and in a way of Favour towards them, in order to their  
Deliverance out of *Egyptian* Bondage. How he had conducted, supplied,  
and defended them in the Wilderness in a miraculous manner. Though  
they had seen all those *Signs, and great Miracles, yet the Lord had not  
given them an Heart to perceive, Eyes to see, and Ears to hear unto this  
Day.*

*In discoursing on the Words, I propose to show,*

**I.** That these Phrases, *an Heart to perceive, etc.* mean an Ability to  
discern in a spiritual manner, receive and delight in spiritual  
Things, because of their Excellency and Glory. And what that  
Ability is.

**II.** I would attempt to prove that there is such an Ability in  
Believers.

**III.** That it cannot be acquired.

**IV.** That it is the Gift of God.

**V.** That he gives it to some and not to others, according to his sovereign Pleasure.

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**I.** *These Phrases, an Heart to perceive, Eyes to see, and Ears to hear, mean an Ability, in a spiritual manner, to discern, receive, and delight in spiritual Things, because of their Excellency and Glory.* Such a Perception, Embracement of, and Pleasure in heavenly Things, are intended, as issue in the Glory of God, and the Salvation of the Soul. Whereof natural Reason is incapable, how much soever it may be cultivated and improved. This Ability, is not a Capacity to understand the Import of the Language of Scripture, concerning the most mysterious Doctrines which it contains. Such as the Doctrine of the Trinity; of the Incarnation of Christ; the Union of the Divine and human Natures, in his Person; of Regeneration; and of other sublime Truths.

Nor is it a Power to discern the Dependence, Connection and Harmony, of evangelical Doctrines. Men in common are the Subjects of an Ability for the former, and of a Capacity for the latter; otherwise they could not be required to believe the Verity of those Doctrines, which are supernaturally revealed. The Reason why Men do not believe the Truths of the Gospel, is not the want of an Ability to understand the Language of Scripture, or of a Capacity to discern the Dependence, Connection and Agreement of evangelical Principles: But the Cause thereof is, they disapprove of them, and account them to be the very Reverse of what they are in fact. They are the Wisdom of God; but in the Esteem of natural Men, they are Folly, and therefore, unfit to be believed and embraced. On the contrary, they think they are to be despised and rejected, as irrational and absurd. *The natural Man receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God, to him they are Foolishness, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* He is a spiritual Man, who judges, or discerns spiritual Things themselves, and consequently, he must be possessed of a spiritual Ability. And that Ability is, a holy supernatural Principle, whereof the whole Soul is the subject, and it is permanent and abiding therein. From that Principle, all holy, spiritual Acts spring.

## **II. I would attempt to prove the Being of such a Principle in Believers.**

And I shall argue from various Modes of Expression, relating to its Production: And from the Representation given of it, and Acts, which are ascribed unto it.

**1.** I will argue from various Modes of Expression, relating to its Production.

**(1.)** It is said to be born, or ingenerated. *That which is born of the Flesh, is Flesh: That which is born of the Spirit, is Spirit* (Joh. 3: 6.). *Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the World* (1Jo. 5: 4.). *Which were born, not of Blood, nor of the Will of the Flesh, nor of the Will of Man; but of God. The Wind bloweth, where it listeth, thou hearest the Sound thereof; but canst not tell from whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: So is every one that is born of the Spirit* (Joh. 3: 3.). No Acts, internal or external, can with any Propriety, be said to be born. But a Principle, which is a Spring of Action, may be said to be born, for it hath proper Subsistence in him, in whom it is produced.

**(2.)** It is a Vivification, or an Infusion of Life into Men, who are dead in Sin. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in Trespass and Sins* (Eph. 2: 1.). Life is a vital Principle. Death is no other than a Privation, or loss of a living Principle. And therefore, quickening us, when dead in Sin, must mean, the Communication of a Principle of Life. And, consequently, there is, in Believers, a vital, holy, and supernatural Principle, from which proceed all their Acts of a holy spiritual Nature.

**(3.)** This Work is a Creation. *We are the Workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good Works* (Ver. 10.). By Reason hereof, the Saints are denominated new Creatures: *If any Man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new Creature*. Acts are not created, they flow from that which previously exists. Creation is giving Being to something, which had not Existence before. And, therefore, this must mean the Production of a Principle in the Mind, which it was not the Subject of until this Time. From hence, it is evident, that there is in Believers, a holy supernatural Principle, which is a Spring of holy, spiritual, and supernatural Acts.

**(4.)** It is giving a new Heart. *A new Heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you* (Eze. 36:25). Acts cannot be denominated the Heart; but a Principle may, which is seared in the Heart; and the Heart is properly said to be good, or evil, as that Principle, whereof it is the

Subject is good, or evil. The new Heart, which God gives, is certainly holy and good, and that is not Acts; but it is a Principle from which holy Acts take their rise. These Things, I think, very clearly prove the Being of a holy, supernatural Principle in Believers.

**2.** I will argue from the Representation given of it, and the Acts, which are ascribed unto it.

**(1.)** It is declared to be Spirit. *That which is born of the Spirit, is Spirit. The Flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the Flesh.* They are opposites, and contrary in their Nature. The Flesh is not Acts; but a Spring of Actions, which are evil. And its opposite, the Spirit, is not Acts; but a Spring of Actions, which are holy and spiritual. And, therefore, there is, in the Saints, a holy supernatural Principle.

**(2.)** It is an *Image*. Actions are not an Image; but a Principle is. This is an *heavenly Image*. *But we all with open Face beholding, as in a Glass, the Glory of the Lord, are changed into the same Image, from Glory to Glory* (2Co. 3:18.). It is the Image and Likeness of God. *For after God it is created in Righteousness and true Holiness* (Eph. 4:24.). *After the Image of Him that created him* (Col. 3:10.). Acts internal, or external, with no Propriety, can be said to be an Image, for they are transient and passing. An Image is not so. Hence we may conclude, that Believers, are the happy Subjects of a Principle, which is the Image and Likeness of God. And that Principle is holy, spiritual and supernatural.

**(3.)** It is a new Man, the contrary of the old Man. *And put ye on the new Man. And have put on the new Man.* The old Man is not Acts, either internal or external; but is a corrupt Principle, from which unholy Actions flow: And the new Man, as not Acts, either internal, or external; but a pure Principle, from which arise holy, spiritual Actions. As the former is a Principle, so is the latter, For, they are direct opposites. And therefore, there is in Believers, a holy, supernatural Principle.

**(4.)** It is called a Law of the Mind, and is the opposite of a Law, which is in the Members. *I see another Law in my Members, warring against the Law of my Mind.* The former Law, is not Acts, neither is the latter Law, Acts. Each is a Principle from which Acts proceed. The Law in the Members, is an evil Principle. The Law of the Mind, is a good Principle. Unholy Actions flow from the former, and holy Actions from the latter. This is, I think, a full Evidence, that there is, in Believers, a holy, supernatural Principle.

(5.) It is represented as a Nature. *That by these ye might be Partakers of the divine Nature* (2Pe. 1: 4.). By which must be intended, a holy, heavenly Principle. For, Acts internal, or external, are not a Nature. Spiritual and heavenly Acts, spring from this Nature, whereof the Saints are made Partakers. But that Nature they are not, nor can be. And, therefore, there is, in Believers, a holy, supernatural Principle. For, such that must be, which is denominated, the divine Nature. Acts it cannot be, it, therefore, must be a Principle.

The Truth of this important Point, will farther, appear, by taking into Consideration, those various Acts, which are ascribed unto it. And in general, lusting against the Flesh is attributed unto it. *The Flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the Flesh* (Gal. 5:17.). This is very comprehensive. For it comprises all the holy Actings of the Mind, in opposition to the Dictates and Motions of the Flesh. It is highly improper, to ascribe Acts to Acts. For Acts do not flow out of Acts. They spring from a Principle. An evil Principle, if the Acts are evil: A good Principle, if the Acts are good and holy. It cannot reasonably be thought, that the Flesh, is a Principle, from which evil Actions arise, and that the Spirit is not a Principle, from which holy Acts take their Rise in the Saints. If the Flesh is a Principle of Action, so is the Spirit. And therefore, there is, in Believers, a holy, spiritual, and supernatural Principle. There are particular Acts ascribed unto it, *viz. Consenting to the Law, that it is good. Delighting in it. And serving of it. I delight in the Law of God, after the inner Man* (Romans 7.). *So then with my Mind, I myself serve the Law of God: But with the Flesh the Law of Sin.* And the same Apostle observes, that *the Fruit of the Spirit, is Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith* (Gal. 5:22.); There is, therefore, in Believers, a holy, spiritual, and supernatural Principle, from which all the holy and gracious Actings of their Souls do proceed. This Principle, I have said, is permanent and abiding. That it is so, maybe concluded from the End of God, in creating, or infusing of it. That End was the everlasting Enjoyment of himself. *Blessed be the God and Father of Lord Jesus Christ, of his abundant Mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively Hope, by the Resurrection of Christ from the Dead, to an Inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you* (1Pe. 1: 3, 4.). This Work upon Men, is *calling them to his eternal Glory* (1Pe. 5:10.). And the Apostle Paul, speaking of the State of future Blessedness, says, *He that hath wrought us for this self-same Thing is God* (2Co. 5: 5.). Since God, in the Creation, or Infusion of this Principle,

which is our Meetness to be Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light, really intended that we should enjoy Himself hereafter, it is impossible, that this Principle should ever become extinct. For, in that Care, He would be disappointed of His End, in its Creation, or Infusion. And it is to be observed, that the most vigorous Actings of Grace, in the Saints, expel not the Flesh, and the most violent Actings of the Flesh in them, expel not the Spirit. This is evident in *David* and *Peter*. *David*, in a very extraordinary manner, acted Grace, as we are informed, 2Sa. 7:18. to the End of the Chapter. His Soul was full of holy Adoration, steady Faith, and flaming Love, and Affection to God. *Is this the manner of Men? What can thy Servant David say more! Therefore have found in mine Heart to pray this Prayer unto thee.* Did those extraordinary Actings of Grace expel, the Flesh? No such Thing. That kept its Possession in the Soul of this holy Man. And, what is enough to make one tremble, soon after this, he acted the very worst Part, that he ever did act, through the whole Course of his Life: So far was Sin from being expelled out of him. An Account is given of the evil Part he did act, in the eleventh Chapter of the same Book. I need not name it, you well know what it was. On the other Hand, the violent Actings of the Flesh in *Peter*, in the Denial of Christ, with very dreadful Aggravations, did not expel the Spirit. Grace did not become extinct in him. His Faith did not fail thereby. Christ had prayed, that it might not. He turned, and looked upon *Peter*, with a Look of Reproof, and Love, which struck him with Awe, and wrought him up to a high degree of evangelical Repentance, for his great Offence. Hence, I think, it is clear, that as the most eminent Actings of Grace expel not Sin: So the worst Actings of Sin, expel not Grace. That is a permanent, abiding Principle in the Soul, which nothing can possibly eradicate. The End of God, in its Production, above mentioned, will eternally secure the Continuance of its Being in the Heart, against all Opposition whatsoever<sup>fl</sup>.

**III. This holy, spiritual, and supernatural Principle cannot, be acquired.** No holy Acts can be exerted, in a Mind destitute of Holiness. Such as Faith, Repentance, and evangelical Obedience. Hence our Lord says; *No Man can come to me except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him* (Joh. 6:44.). And the Apostle affirms that *the carnal Mind is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be* (Rom. 8: 7.); and *that, without Faith, it is impossible to please God* (Heb. 11: 6). There are many Professors; who cannot bear to hear it asserted, that Men unregenerate, are incapable to act a Part, pleasing and acceptable to God. Let such Persons speak out, and tell us whether it is lawful for us to make use of, and

explain these Texts in our Bibles, or not. There is Reason to think, that if the Lord Jesus Christ was now upon Earth, and they were to hear Him express Himself, as He did, in relation to this Subject, they would censure Him for it. Their Censuring of us for asserting this Inability of unregenerate Men, gives us no other Concern, than what arises from this Consideration, that through others, they censure our blessed Lord Himself, and His Apostles, who spake, as they were dictated by the Spirit of Christ. Men cannot be assisted to acquire this Principle of Holiness, and spiritual Life. He who is dead cannot be enabled to put forth vital Acts. And he who is blind, that is to say, is destitute of a visive Faculty, cannot be helped to see. Natural Men are dead, destitute of a Principle of spiritual Life, and of a spiritual visive Faculty, and therefore, they cannot be enabled to act, or to see in a spiritual Manner.

It is unreasonable to think, that the Mind, as carnal, can be influenced unto holy Acts. The Flesh is only and entirely engaged in the Service of Sin. And it perpetually lusteth against the Spirit in Believers. It concurs not with the gracious Principle, in the Saints, in any of its Actings; but ever opposes it. Hence there is a Tincture of Evil in all the holy Actings of their Minds, and in all the Duties which they perform. By reason of the perpetual Presence of Evil in them, they sin in Meditation, Prayer, Reading, Hearing, and in every other religious Exercise. The sad Experience of Believers, is a standing Evidence of the Truth thereof. How then, can it be supposed, that those, who only have Flesh in them, may be excited to exert holy Acts, in order to acquire a holy Principle? If the Flesh in unregenerate Men may be enabled to put forth holy Acts: Surely it may be brought to concur with the Spirit, in its Acts, in the Regenerate; but that is false, both Scripture, and the Experience of all the Saints testify. And, therefore, it is impossible, that it should be enabled by any Aids whatsoever, to act in a holy, spiritual Manner. And, consequently, no Man, who is in the Flesh, or in an unregenerate State, can be enabled to exert holy Acts, whereby a holy Principle may be acquired. I would speak it with Reverence, and I hope you will hear it with Reverence; *Omnipotence itself cannot cause Enmity to Love.* For, that implies a Contradiction. And as the carnal Mind is Enmity itself against God, it is absolutely impossible to cause it to love Him. In our depraved Nature, there is nothing but a mere passive Capacity to receive a holy, spiritual Principle from God, in a way of Creation, or Infusion. That is all which we can with Truth, say of ourselves, as we are carnal and corrupt. The Will of the Flesh does not, it cannot co-operate with the Grace of God, in



our Regeneration. For, that would be acting contrary to its Nature. And, therefore, at cannot, even by divine Influence, be caused to act spiritually. And, consequently, it is impossible, that Men, who are destitute of a Principle of Holiness, should be enabled to acquire such a Principle. *It is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth; but of God that sheweth Mercy.*

**IV.** *This holy, spiritual, and supernatural Principle, is the Gift of God. He is the sole Author, and efficient Cause of it.* Hence the new Birth is always ascribed to Him. The Saints are said to *be born of God. To be born of the Spirit. Which were born, not of Blood, nor of the Will of the Flesh, nor of the Will of Man; but of God. That which is born of the Flesh, is Flesh: That which is born of the Spirit, is Spirit. So is every one that is born of the Spirit. God of his abundant Mercy begets us again. Of his own Will begat He us.* This Principle is a good, and perfect Gift, which cometh down from above, from the Father of Lights. With respect to Faith, the Apostle asserts negatively, that it is not of ourselves: And he affirms positively, that it is the Gift Of God. *By Grace are we saved through Faith, that not of ourselves, it is the Gift of God.* And declares to the *Ephesians*, that we are, as Saints, the Workmanship of God. *For we are the Workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus unto good Works.* This Principle, therefore, is a divine Gift, and is not acquired, by those in whom it is. It is so the Gift of God, that the Subjects of it had not, nor could have the least causal Influence in its Production. For this Principle, is not only superior unto, and above all that was in them before, in its Nature; but also, it is absolutely contrary to the natural Disposition of their Minds. And, consequently, it must have been produced in them by divine Grace, without any concurrent Act of their Will therein, or in order thereunto. It is unreasonable to suppose, that one contrary, is capable of exerting Acts, which tend to the Production of another. Is not the Flesh contrary to the Spirit? It is. And is not the Spirit contrary to the Flesh? It is. And they counter-act one another perpetually. And, therefore, this holy, spiritual, and supernatural Principle, must be a divine Gift, in the most full, and absolute Sense. It is a new Life in the Soul, which was dead before. And it is as much the Gift of God, as Life is, which is communicated to a Man, who before, was dead naturally. As a Man who is naturally dead, cannot contribute to the Production of Life in himself: So such who are dead in Sin, can contribute nothing to the Production of a vital Principle of Holiness, in themselves. If God doth not graciously give to them such a Principle, they will eternally remain destitute of it: Or

continue dead in Trespasses and Sins for evermore. For, as hath been before observed, they cannot possibly be assisted to acquire it. As a Man naturally dead cannot be enabled to acquire Life: So one who is dead in Sin, cannot be assisted to acquire this new, and heavenly Life.

***V. The Lord gives this Ability to some, and not to others, according to His sovereign Pleasure.***

God is not under Obligation to communicate Holiness to any sinful Creature. He bestows His Grace upon, or withholds it from fallen Creatures, as He Himself is pleased to determine. But the Exercise of His Sovereignty, in dispensing His Grace, Men cannot bear with. If He will give Grace to some, and not to others, they will *impiously* dare to reproach Him to His Face, on Account thereof, But let them know this, that they must one Day be accountable to Him for it. Men allow one another to do what they please with their own. To bestow their Favours on whom they think proper. On this Person, and not on another. Yet they will not allow that Liberty to their Maker. On the contrary, if He bestows what is absolutely His own, on some, and not on others, they will censure Him for it. Which is most unreasonable Impiety in them. If Grace is not God's own, and at His sovereign Disposal, He hath nothing that is so. For, what Claim, can an unholy Creature have upon God to communicate Holiness to him? If you shall say, that it is fit, convenient, and becoming, that God should bestow Grace upon, or communicate Holiness unto a lapsed Creature, I will prove, that He cannot but give Grace to apostate Spirits, and unto Men universally. If you inquire how. I answer thus: God cannot omit doing what is fit, convenient, and becoming, that He should do it. And, therefore, if it is fit, convenient, and becoming, that He should communicate Holiness to a fallen Creature, he cannot but bestow his Grace upon, or communicate Holiness, unto apostate Spirits and Men universally, Without Distinction, or Difference. The Reason is most clear, which is this: It is not possible with God, ever to omit doing, what it is fit, proper, and becoming, He should do. As it is impossible with Him to do what is improper, unfit, and unbecoming, that He should do it. So, it is impossible with Him not to do what is fit, proper, and becoming, that He should do it. Since, therefore, He does not bestow His Grace upon, or make all His fallen Creatures Partakers of His Holiness; but some only: It is evident, that the Reason why He bestows His Grace upon some, is not because it was fit, convenient, and becoming, that so He should do; but because such was His sovereign Pleasure, concerning them, He was at full

Liberty to dispense Grace to *Paul*, and not to *Pharaoh*: To communicate Holiness to *Peter*, and not to *Judas*. Because, the Communication of Holiness unto, or the Bestowment of Grace upon an unholy Creature, is not due from God, by Reason it is fit, that He should bestow it. And, therefore, to make a sinful Creature holy, by a Communication of Grace and Holiness, is a pure sovereign Act of God; if it is not, no divine Act is such. If it is not free with God, to love, do Good unto; and render eternally happy, guilty and sinful Creatures, or the contrary, as He Himself, pleases to determine, in nothing can His Will be at Liberty, in his Resolutions about them. Our blessed Lord resolves this wholly into the sovereign Pleasure of his divine Father, when He addresses Him thus: *Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, I thank Thee, that Thou hast hid these things from the Wise and Prudent, and hast revealed them unto Babes: Even so Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.*

When spiritual Things are said to be hid from the Wise and Prudent, by God. The Meaning is not, that He took from them their natural Power of Understanding: Nor, that He did not externally reveal those Things unto them. For they had an external Revelation of them, as well as the Babes. But the Meaning is plainly this: He did not give to them, a Capacity to understand those Things, which He did give to Babes, who were much their Inferiors in natural Knowledge, because such was His Pleasure: And no other Cause can be assigned why heavenly Things were concealed from the former, as to their Nature, and made known to the latter but the sovereign Will of God.

I hope It appears, that Believers are the Subjects of a holy, spiritual, and supernatural Principle. — That this Principle cannot be acquired. — That it is the Gift of God; and that he gives it to some, and not to others, according to His sovereign Pleasure. *Some Observations may now be made.*

**Observ. 1.** Hence we may easily see, that the Irresistibility of divine Grace, is consistent with our natural Freedom, or the natural Liberty of our Will. For,

(1.) The Will is entirely, passive, in the Infusion, or Creation of this Principle. It is not actively concerned therein. The Will holds itself absolutely inactive in the Infusion of this spiritual Principle. It neither chooses, nor refuses: Neither concurs, nor opposes, in this divine Work upon the Soul. The Nature of the Thing is a full Evidence thereof. For it is

the Communication of a Principle of Life to the Soul, which is dead in Sin, and, therefore, it is impossible that the Mind should exert any concurrent, or opposing Act therein. The natural Liberty of the Will, therefore, cannot be infringed, in the Infusion of this Principle.

(2.) By the Creation of this Principle in the Heart, the Will is sanctified, and becomes habitually inclined to Holiness, in Consequence of this Work upon the Soul. And, therefore, as there is a Disposition in the Will of Believers to Acts of sin, as it is corrupt: So, there is a Disposition in their Will to Holiness, as it is sanctified by the Infusion of this Principle. And their Choice of Evil is free, and their Choice of Good is voluntary. For, the Will suffers no Violence, in acting agreeably to the Nature of the evil, or good Disposition, whereof it is the Subject. The effectual Influences of divine Grace upon the Will, as sanctified, are no other, than exciting it to such Acts, as It hath an habitual Disposition unto. It is, therefore, absurd to conceive, that those Influences put any Force upon the Will. It is undoubtedly free, in acting agreeably to the Nature of that holy Disposition, whereof it is the Subject, though it is by the Grace of God stirred up, so to act. There Things are observed, by Doctor *Preston*, in a Latin Oration, which he delivered in the University of *Cambridge*. Which Oration, for its *Conciseness, Perspicuity, and nervous Reasoning*, is most worthy to be read.

**Observ. 2.** These Things will enable us to set the Doctrine of Election, in a very familiar and unexceptionable Light. For, it is no other, than the eternal Purpose of God, to give Grace to some, which no sinful Mortal upon Earth hath a Right to claim of his Maker. Let us consider this Point calmly and seriously. As we are depraved, we are unmeet for, and indisposed unto present Communion with God, and the Enjoyment of Him, hereafter. And we are so far from being worthy of His Favour, that we are justly deferring of His Vengeance. Is He then obliged to give us Grace to fit us for present Communion with Him, and the everlasting Enjoyment of Himself hereafter? Who will dare to say, that God is under such an Obligation, to any guilty Creature? And if He is not, then he may bestow His Grace upon us, or not, as He Himself pleases. And if the actual Bestowment of Grace upon us, is what God may do, or not do. Surely, He was fully at Liberty, to determine, in his everlasting Counsels, on whom He would bestow His Grace, and on whom He would not. Now, as Election is God's eternal Purpose to communicate Holiness to those, who are the Objects of that Decree, to fit them for Communion with Him here,

and for the Enjoyment of Himself hereafter. This His Determination concerning them, was such an Act, as He was not obliged unto, with respect to any sinful Creature. And, therefore, at was absolutely free with Him, to fix on the Particular Persons, unto whom He would communicate His Grace. It is evident, that Election is no other than such a Purpose in the divine Mind. For, our holy Vocation, is according to God's Purpose. *We are saved, and called with an holy Calling, according to his own Purpose and Grace, which was given us, Christ, before the World began.* If God in Time, may sanctify whom He pleases, by His Spirit, it must have been absolutely free with Him, to choose whom He would, to Salvation through Sanctification of the Spirit. As the Lord in Time, may do that in favor of some, which He is not under the least Obligation to do in favor of any: So he might in Eternity, form such a Resolution, and He actually did. Which Act was the Election of those Persons, unto a Participation of His Holiness here, in order unto the future Enjoyment of Himself.

**Observ. 3.** Hence we learn, that it is not acting a pharisaical and legal Part, to look into ourselves, for Holiness, in order to our Consolation, and to give Praise to God, for what He has wrought in us. Some censure so doing, as Pharisaism and Legality, under a high Pretence of Zeal, for the Doctrine of imputed Righteousness. As if considering with ourselves, whether we are the Subjects of Sanctification, was inconsistent with a Dependence on the Righteousness of Christ for Justification. If I am not the Subject of Holiness, what Evidence can I possibly have, that I am the Object of Justification? If indeed, we taught Men, that they are to look into themselves for Holiness, in order to encourage them to trust in the Righteousness of Christ for Acceptance, they would be furnished with Matter of just Objection. But no orthodox sound Divine, who understands himself, does so teach. The Reason why I depend upon the Righteousness of Christ is, I see the Necessity of an Interest in it, and the Glory of it, and not because I am made holy by the Grace of God. These are Things most clearly distinct, and easily to be distinguished. And yet, there are some it seems, even among ourselves, and who are Masters, in our *Israel*, who cannot, or will not distinguish them. I hope you will excuse my familiar way of speaking; these things are but A, B, C, in, Divinity. Heart-work is become the Subject of Sneer. And, Dr. *Owen*, whose experimental, and practical Writings, will, I am of Opinion, render his Memory precious, as long as spiritual savoury Christians shall subsist, is charged, with having *much self-righteous* Chaff, on Account of them. This is that sad Pass unto

which Things are now arrived with some amongst us. For my Part, I am free to declare to all the World, that as on one Hand, I care not in the least, by whom, I am represented as an *Antinomian*, for preaching the distinguishing Doctrines of the Gospel: So, on the other, I shall never be concerned by whomsoever I am censured, as a Pharisee and Legalist, for recommending, experimental, and practical Religion. *A late learned Writer militates against the Doctrine I have advanced, in a Discourse on the Words of my Text, and objects, as follows,*

**Object. 1.** *Nothing can be more inconsistent with the perfect Goodness, and Justice of the divine Being. — Is it the Character of infinite Goodness to enjoin Men what is above their Abilities, and not to give them proportionable Strength, if their Duty does, in any particular Circumstances, exceed the Measure of their Capacity? Does it become a Being of perfect Justice to punish Men for not doing what is above their Strength, and what he never intended they should do?<sup>12</sup>*

**Answ.** Men's Inability for the Performance of their Duty, is the Consequence of Sin. This arguing, therefore, is no other than this: A Master is neither good, nor just, who blames his Servant for not performing his Duty, when he is incapable of it, though his being so, is the Effect of a Debauch, or Intemperance. This reasoning, though often used, is below Men of Sense and Learning.



**Object. 2.** *It is no less disagreeable to the Kindness, which God had shown this People, and to the whole Course of his Providence towards them, than it is to his own Perfections.*

**Answ.** Arguing from the Goodness of God, towards that People, in the Course of his Providence, to prove an Intention in Him, to make them holy and eternally happy, is inconclusive and impertinent. And His giving them excellent Laws, is no Proof, that He gave them an Ability to yield spiritual Obedience to His Commands.

**Object. 3.** *This Sense will not agree with the End of Moses in speaking to them, nor with the other Parts of his Discourse. His Design manifestly was to move them to a serious Consideration of their past Sins, that they might repent of them, and make this Covenant with a hearty Resolution not to rebel against God, as they had often done; but to continue obedient to his Voice, that they might enjoy the promised Land. How could he hope to work them into a godly Sorrow for their past Transgressions, or a firm Resolution of acting better, by affirming, that God had not given them*

*Ability to keep his Commandments? — Besides, this makes Moses contradict himself, for he plainly declares in the next Words, that God designed they should know and obey his Will. — That ye might know that I am the Lord your God.*

**Answ.** Spiritual Blessings were not promised in this Covenant. Nor was a spiritual Obedience required of the People therein. No other than temporal Favours were promised, in that Covenant. And no other than an external Obedience was required of the People therein, which they, as Men, without sanctifying Grace, were capable of yielding. And sometimes they did externally obey those Laws, which God gave them, then it went well with them. But when they rebelled, it went ill with them. And a spiritual Knowledge of God is not designed but a natural Knowledge of Him, as Creator, and their Preserver, and a bountiful Benefactor to them, as a Nation. And, therefore, *Moses* is far from contradicting himself, in affirming, that God had not given them an Heart to perceive, Eyes to see, Ears to hear in a spiritual Sense.

The learned Man seems to disapprove of our Translation, and to prefer a different one. The *Septuagint*, and all ancient Translations, the *vulgate Latin*, and *Junius*, read the Words negatively, as we do. *The Lord hath not given.* He observes, that the *Hebrew* Particle,  is sometimes used in an interrogative Sense, the Prefix  being understood: And, is for reading the Words thus: *And hath not the Lord given you an Heart to perceive, and Eyes to see, and Ears to hear?* The Meaning of which is, according to the Use of such Interrogations; *and God hath given you an Heart to perceive, and Eyes to see, Ears to hear,* even to this Time.

**Answ.** This Part is often acted by those who differ from us. *Hebrew* Particles, and *Greek* Prepositions, are a large Field, wherein they exercise their critical Skill, in order to pervert the Scripture. It is freely granted, that the *Hebrew* Particle, is sometimes so translated, where the Scope and Subject of the Writer require it. But that is no Proof that it should be thus rendered in these Words. For being negatively taken it supplies no ill Sense: Or which is contrary to other Parts of Scripture and the Analogy of Faith. And, therefore, our Version may justly be allowed.

Allowing our Translation, he says, *It is absurd to suppose he (Moses) means, that God had not given them a Capacity to understand, consider, and obey. his Will, for then he could not have justly blamed them for not doing better; but that they had as little reflected upon the Wonders they*

*had seen; and observed the Precepts given them, as if God had not blessed them with these Faculties, but they were quite blind and deaf.*

**Answ. 1.** It is absurd to conceive that God may not justly blame Men for not perfectly performing His Will, though to them It is impossible, through an Inability, which attends them: Because their Incapacity to yield perfect Obedience to God's Commands, is the Effect of Sin. That Incapacity, therefore is no Excuse for their Defects in Obedience.

**2.** It is a very forced and unnatural Sense, which the learned Man puts upon the Text. *Moses says, The Lord hath not given you an Heart to perceive.* That is to say, according to this Writer: "You have not well used those Powers, wherewith God hath endowed you; but have acted, as if you had them not." What can be more unnatural than this? The Words of *Moses*, express what God had not done; but it seems, they are to be understood of what this People had not done. He speaks of God indeed; but in Fact he hath no Regard to him, he wholly and only respects the People. This is not to interpret, but contradict the Scripture,

He adds: *An Heart to perceive, Eyes to see, and Ears to hear, may denote an understanding Heart, seeing Eyes, and hearing Ears; not a bare Faculty of perceiving, seeing, and bearing; but a good Disposition to understand and obey, acquired by that Faculty.*

**Answ. 1.** An evil Heart cannot exert good Acts, whereby a good Disposition may be acquired. The Hearts of all Men are naturally evil and *desperately wicked*, how, therefore, is it possible, for them to put forth good Acts, in order to acquire a good Disposition? It is as reasonable to think, that an evil Tree may bear good Fruit: Or a bitter Fountain may send forth sweet Streams, which all know to be impossible.

**2.** According to what is here said, the meaning of *Moses* must be this, when he says, *the Lord hath not given you, etc.* Ye have not acquired an understanding Heart, seeing Eyes, and hearing Ears. He affirms what God had not done for this People; but he does not mean as he speaks; his Meaning is, what they had not done for themselves. Can greater Violence be offered to Language than this is? God hath not given, *Moses* says; but he means, ye have not acquired; as this Author will have it. *Moses* says one Thing but means quite another. And designs to express what the People had not done, by asserting what God had not done.



Farther, the Author observes: That *Moses says not that God had denied them a Capacity and Means sufficient to understand and do his Will; but that he had not given them an understanding Heart, and an obedient Will, or had not made them wise and good Men.*

**Ans. 1.** Men destitute of spiritual Wisdom and Goodness, are incapable of understanding and doing the Will of God in an acceptable manner.

**2.** The Author's Meaning is not, that God makes Men wise and good; but that those, who are wise and good, have made themselves so, by a proper Use of such Means as he afforded them for that Purpose, when they had no spiritual Wisdom, or Goodness, in them. So that it is supposed, or taken for granted, that Men may act wisely, before they have Wisdom, and do that which is good, before they have Goodness in them. Whereupon, and in Consequence of which, they become wise and good. If this is true, then those *who are in the Flesh may please God.*

He proceeds thus: *When it is said, that God had not given these Blessings, this is not to be understood of his Intention, as if he was not willing to give them; but may be understood of the Event only, that he had not actually given them, whatever was the Cause. That is said to be given, which is accepted; and that not to be given, which is refused by him, to whom it was offered. — God was willing to give them true Wisdom, and to have made them virtuous God does not actually bestow these Things, is Men's wilful neglect of Means, and wickedly resisting his Grace.*

**Ans. 1.** This Discourse supposes, that God was prevented doing what He really intended to *do*, through their Obstinacy and Perverseness. His Will, therefore, was resisted, or overcome, by their stubborn and perverse Will. Which the divine Will never can be in any Instance. For, *who hath resisted His Will?*

**2.** It is taken for granted, without offering the least Proof, that Men may act wisely, and make Choice of Holiness, before they are wise and holy. Than which, there is nothing more false. Full Proof, I hope, is given thereof, above. Yea, that no Aid whatsoever, can assist the carnal Mind to become subject to the Law of God. And, therefore, no Acts of Holiness can be exerted, by an unregenerate Man.

**3.** The Will of Man, in Regeneration is wholly passive. It neither wills, nor nills. It neither concurs with divine Grace therein, nor opposes. Nor is it possible that it should. For, no Proposal is made to the Mind, whether it

will receive a holy, and gracious Disposition, or not. Such a Disposition, or a Principle of Holiness, is immediately, and imperceptibly created, or infused into the Soul. The Will, therefore, hath not an Opportunity of exerting itself, either in a way of Choice, or Refusal.

**4.** If that is true, which this Writer pleads for, the Holiness and Happiness of Men, is, at least, as much owing to themselves, as to the Grace of God. For, divine Grace, according, to his Sentiments, cannot be effectual, without the Concurrence of the human Will. And our Holiness and Happiness, must ultimately be resolved, into our Will, as the Cause thereof, and not the Will of God. And, therefore, boasting, in ourselves, upon this Principle, is not, nor can be excluded. Wherefore, this Doctrine is repugnant to the Scripture, which excludes all boasting in Men. As to Holiness, we are nothing casually; but by the Grace of God, we are what we are. Unto Him, therefore, let us ever ascribe the Glory.



## FOOTNOTES

<sup>ft1</sup> If any should object to this, and say, an Act of Sin in the Non-elect Angels, expelled out of them that Holiness, which was con-created with them: And an Act of Sin in *Adam* expelled out of him that Holiness, which was con-created with him, why therefore, may it not be concluded, that sinful Actions in a Believer may possibly expel Grace out of his Heart, or cause it to become extinct? I would answer thus: God, in endowing those Angels with Holiness, in their Creation, did not intend, that they should enjoy Himself for ever, by Means thereof. Nor did He design that *Adam* should enjoy Himself for ever, by Means of that Holiness wherewith he endowed him in his Creation. But it is his, Design, that Believers should enjoy Himself for ever, by means of that Holiness, wherewith He endows them in their new Creation. And therefore, though those Angels lost their Holiness and *Adam* also lost his, which was con-created with him, it doth not follow, that Believers may lose those gracious Habits, or that holy Principle, with which they are endowed in their new Creation. Again, the Divine Nature in Believers, never concurs with the Flesh in Acts of Sin; but lusteth against it. And the Prevalence of the Flesh against that Nature, effects no Change in it, for it still remains what it was. And the Continuance of its Being in the Soul depends not upon his Acts; but absolutely on the Will of God, who infused or created it. If indeed, God created this Principle without an Intention, that by means of it, those, in whom it is, should enjoy Himself for ever, it might become extinct. But as He did create it with such an Intention, it cannot. Or, if this Principle itself were to sin, or if the Mind, according to this Principle were to sin, its Nature would thereupon be changed, or it would become extinct; but that it doth not, nor ever will. Hence with respect unto it, the Apostle says: *It is no more I that do it; but sin, that dwelleth* in me. Upon the whole, I think, it may be concluded surely, that holy Habits created of God, with a Purpose, that by Means thereof, those, in whom they are, may come to the blissful Enjoyment of Himself, can never be lost, through any Cause whatsoever.

<sup>ft2</sup> Vol. of Sermons, by Mr. *Joseph Morris*, Page 267.