

THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM

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Historically, this title is of little accuracy or worth; I use it to denote certain points of doctrine, because custom has made it familiar. Early in the seventeenth century the Presbyterian Church of Holland, whose doctrinal confession is the same in substance with ours, was much troubled by a species of new-school minority, headed by one of its preachers and professors, James Harmensen, in Latin, Arminius (hence, ever since, Arminians). Church and state have always been united in Holland; hence the civil government took up the quarrel. Professor Harmensen (Arminius) and his party were required to appear before the State's General (what we would call Federal Congress) and say what their objections were against the doctrines of their own church, which they had freely promised in their ordination vows to teach. Arminius handed in a writing in which he named five points of doctrine concerning which he and his friends either differed or doubted. These points were virtually: Original sin, unconditional predestination, invincible grace in conversion, particular redemption, and perseverance of saints. I may add, the result was: that the Federal legislature ordered the holding of a general council of all the Presbyterian churches then in the world, to discuss anew and settle these five doctrines. This was the famous Synod of Dort, or Dordrecht, where not only Holland ministers, but delegates from the French, German, Swiss, and British churches met in 1618. The Synod adopted the rule that every doctrine should be decided by the sole authority of the word of God, leaving out all human philosophies and opinions on both sides. The result was a short set of articles which were made a part thenceforward of the Confession of Faith of the Holland Presbyterian Church. They are clear, sound, and moderate, exactly the same in substance with those of our Westminster Confession, enacted twenty-seven years afterward.

I have always considered this paper handed in by Arminius as of little worth or importance. It is neither honest nor clear. On several points it seeks cunningly to insinuate doubts or to confuse the minds of opponents by using the language of pretended orthodoxy. But as the debate went on, the differences of the Arminians disclosed themselves as being, under a pretended new name nothing in the world but the old semi-pelagianism which had been plaguing the churches for a thousand years, the cousin-german of the Socinian or Unitarian creed. Virtually it denied that the fallen Adam had brought man's heart into an entire and decisive alienation from God; it asserted that his election of grace was not sovereign, but founded in his own foresight of the faith, repentance and perseverance of such

as would choose to embrace the gospel. That grace in effectual calling is not efficacious and invincible, but resistible, so that all actual conversions are the joint result of this grace and the sinner's will working abreast. That Christ died equally for the non-elect and the elect, providing an indefinite, universal atonement for all; and that true converts may, and sometimes do, fall away totally and finally from the state of grace and salvation; their perseverance therein depending not on efficacious grace, but on their own free will to continue in gospel duties.

Let any plain mind review these five changes and perversions of Bible truth, and he will see two facts: One, that the debate about them all will hinge mainly upon the first question, whether man's original sin is or is not a complete and decisive enmity to godliness; and the other, that this whole plan is a contrivance to gratify human pride and self-righteousness and to escape that great humbling fact everywhere so prominent in the real gospel, that man's ruin of himself by sin is utter, and the whole credit of his redemption from it is God's.

We Presbyterians care very little about the name Calvinism. We are not ashamed of it; but we are not bound to it. Some opponents seem to harbor the ridiculous notion that this set of doctrines was the new invention of the Frenchman John Calvin. They would represent us as in this thing followers of him instead of followers of the Bible. This is a stupid historical error. John Calvin no more invented these doctrines than he invented this world which God had created six thousand years before. We believe that he was a very gifted, learned, and, in the main, godly man, who still had his faults. He found substantially this system of doctrines just where we find them, in the faithful study of the Bible, where we see them taught by all the prophets, apostles, and the Messiah himself, from Genesis to Revelation.

Calvin also found the same doctrines handed down by the best, most learned, most godly, uninspired church fathers, as Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas, still running through the errors of popery. He wielded a wide influence over the Protestant churches; but the Westminster Assembly and the Presbyterian churches by no means adopted all Calvin's opinions. Like the Synod of Dort, we draw our doctrines, not from any mortal man or human philosophy, but from the Holy Ghost speaking in the Bible. Yet, we do find some inferior comfort in discovering these same doctrines of grace in the most learned and pious of all churches and ages; of the great fathers of Romanism, of Martin Luther, of Blaise Pascal, of the original Protestant churches, German, Swiss, French, Holland, English and Scotch, and far the largest part of the real scriptural churches of our

own day. The object of this tractate is simply to enable all honest inquirers after truth to understand just what those doctrines really are which people style the peculiar "doctrines of Presbyterians," and thus to enable honest minds to answer all objections and perversions. I do not write because of any lack in our church of existing treatises well adapted to our purpose; nor because I think anyone can now add anything really new to the argument. But our pastors and missionaries think that some additional good may come from another short discussion suitable for unprofessional readers. To such I would earnestly recommend two little books, Dr. Mathews' on the Divine Purpose, and Dr. Nathan Rice's God Sovereign and Man Free. For those who wish to investigate these doctrines more extensively there are, in addition to their Bible, the standard works in the English language on doctrinal divinity, such as Calvin's Institutes (translated), Witsius on the Covenants, Dr. William Cunningham's, of Edinburgh, Hill's and Dicks' Theologies, and in the United States those of Hedge, Dabney, and Shedd. All these can be purchased from or through our Assembly's Committee of Publication, No. 1001 Main street Richmond, Va., and sent by mail.

I. WHAT PRESBYTERIANS REALLY MEAN BY "ORIGINAL SIN," "TOTAL DEPRAVITY," AND "INABILITY OF THE WILL":

Confession of Faith, Chapter IX, Section iii. "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto."

By original sin we mean the evil quality which characterizes man's natural disposition and will. We call this sin of nature original, because each fallen man is born with it, and because it is the source or origin in each man of his actual transgressions.

By calling it total, we do not mean that men are from their youth as bad as they can be. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, "deceiving and being deceived." (2 Tim. iii.13) Nor do we mean that they have no social virtues towards their fellowmen in which they are sincere. We do not assert with extremists that because they are natural men, therefore all their friendship, honesty, truth, sympathy, patriotism, domestic love, are pretenses or hypocrisies. What our Confession says is, "That they have wholly lost ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation." The worst retain some, and the better much, ability of will for sundry moral goods accompanying social life. Christ teaches this (Mark x. 21) when, beholding the social virtues of the rich young man who came kneeling unto him, "He loved him," Christ could never love mere hypocrisies. What we teach is,

that by the fall man's moral nature has undergone an utter change to sin, irreparable by himself. In this sense it is complete, decisive, or total. The state is as truly sinful as their actual transgressions, because it is as truly free and spontaneous. This original sin shows itself in all natural men in a fixed and utter opposition of heart to some forms of duty, and especially and always to spiritual duties, owing to God, and in a fixed and absolutely decisive purpose of heart to continue in some sins (even while practicing some social duties), and especially to continue in their sins of unbelief, impenitence, self-will, and practical godlessness. In this the most moral are as inflexibly determined by nature as the most immoral. The better part may sincerely respect sundry rights and duties regarding their fellowmen, but in the resolve that self-will shall be their rule, whenever they please, as against God's sovereign holy will, these are as inexorable as the most wicked. I suppose that a refined and genteelly reared young lady presents the least sinful specimen of unregenerate human nature. Examine such a one. Before she would be guilty of theft, profane swearing, drunkenness, or impurity, she would die. In her opposition to these sins she is truly sincere. But there are some forms of self-will, especially in sins of omission as against God, in which she is just as determined as the most brutal drunkard is in his sensuality. She has, we will suppose, a Christian mother. She is determined to pursue certain fashionable conformities and dissipations. She has a light novel under her pillow which she intends to read on the Sabbath. Though she may still sometimes repeat like a parrot her nursery prayers, hers is spiritually a prayerless life. Especially is her heart fully set in her not to forsake at this time her life of self-will and worldliness for Christ's service and her salvation. Tenderly and solemnly her Christian mother may ask her, "My daughter, do you not know that in these things you are wrong toward your heavenly Father" She is silent. She knows she is wrong. "My daughter, will you not therefore now relent, and choose for your Savior's sake, this very day, the life of faith and repentance, and especially begin tonight the life of regular, real, secret prayer. Will you?" Probably her answer is in a tone of cold and bitter pain. "Mother, don't press me, I would rather not promise." No; she will not! Her refusal may be civil in form, because she is well-bred; but her heart is as inflexibly set in her as the hardened steel not at this time to turn truly from her self-will to her God. In that particular her stubbornness is just the same as that of the most hardened sinners. Such is the best type of unregenerate humanity.

Now, the soul's duties towards God are the highest, dearest, and most urgent of all duties; so that willful disobedience herein is the most express, most guilty, and most hardening of all the sins that the soul commits. God's perfections and will are the most supreme and perfect standard of moral right and truth. Therefore, he who sets

himself obstinately against God's right is putting himself in the most fatal probation and praise of his fellow-men; and their contempt and abuse are naturally painful to him. In all these cases men choose according as they prefer, and they prefer according to their natural dispositions, happiness rather than misery, gain rather than loss, applause rather than abuse. They are free in these choices as they are sure to choose in the given way. And they are as certain to choose agreeably to these original dispositions as rivers are to run downwards; equally certain and equally free, because the dispositions which certainly regulate their preferences are their own, not some one else's, and are spontaneous in them, not compelled.

Let us apply one of these cases. I make this appeal to a company of aspiring young ladies and gentlemen: "Come and engage with me of your free choice in this given course of labor; it will be long and arduous; but I can assure you of a certain result. I promise you that, by this laborious effort, you shall make yourselves the most despised and abused set of young people in the State." Will this succeed in inducing them? Can it succeed? No; it will not, and we justly say, it cannot. But are not these young persons free when they answer me, as they certainly will, "No, Teacher, we will not, and we cannot commit the folly of working hard solely to earn contempt, because contempt is in itself contrary and painful to our nature." This is precisely parallel to what Presbyterians mean by inability of will to all spiritual good. It is just as real and certain as inability of faculty. These young people have the fingers therewith to perform the proposed labor, let us say of writing, by which I invite them to toil for the earning of contempt. They have eyes and fingers wherewith to do penmanship, but they cannot freely choose my offer, because it contradicts that principle of their nature, love of applause, which infallibly regulates free human preference and choice. Here is an exact case of "inability of will." If, now, man's fall has brought into his nature a similar native principle or disposition against godliness for its own sake, and in favor of self-will as against God, then a parallel case of inability of will presents itself. The former case explains the latter. The natural man's choice in preferring his self-will to God's authority is equally free, and equally certain. But this total lack of ability of will toward God does not suspend man's responsibility, because it is the result of his own free disposition, not from any compulsion from without. If a master would require his servant to do a bodily act for which he naturally had not the bodily faculty, as, for instance, the pulling up of a healthy oak tree with his hands, it would be unjust to punish the servant's failure. But this is wholly another case than the sinner's. For, if his natural disposition towards God were what it ought to be, he would not find himself deprived of the natural faculties by which God is known, loved, and served. The sinner's case is not one of extinction of faculties, but of

their thorough willful perversion. It is just like the case of Joseph's wicked brethren, of whom Moses says (Gen. xxxvii. 4): "That they hated their brother Joseph, so that they could not speak peaceably unto him." They had tongues in their heads? Yes. They could speak in words whatever they chose, but hatred, the wicked voluntary principle, ensured that they would not, and could not, speak kindly to their innocent brother.

Now, then, all the argument turns upon the question of fact: is it so that since Adam's fall the natural disposition of all men is in this state of fixed, decisive enmity against God's will, and fixed, inexorable preference for their own self-will, as against God? Is it true that man is in this lamentable state, that while still capable of being rightly disposed toward sundry virtues and duties, terminating on his fellow creatures, his heart is inexorably indisposed and willfully opposed to those duties which he owes to his heavenly Father directly? That is the question! Its best and shortest proof would be the direct appeal to every man's conscience. I know that it was just so with me for seventeen years, until God's almighty hand took away the heart of stone and gave me a heart of flesh. Every converted man confesses the same of himself. Every unconverted man well knows that it is now true of himself, if he would allow his judgment and conscience to look honestly within. Unbeliever, you may at times desire even earnestly the impunity, the safety from hell, and the other selfish advantages of the Christian life; but did you ever prefer and desire that life for its own sake? Did you ever see the moment when you really wished God to subjugate all your self-will to his holy will? No! That is the very thing which the secret disposition of your soul utterly resents and rejects. The retention of that self-will is the very thing which you so obstinately prefer, that as long as you dare you mean to retain it and cherish it, even at the known risk of an unprepared death and a horrible perdition. But I will add other proofs of this awful fact, and especially the express testimony of the Holy Spirit.

There is the universal fact that all men sin more or less, and do it willfully. In the lives of most unrenewed men, sin reigns prevalently. The large majority are dishonest, unjust, selfish, cruel, as far as they dare to be, even to their fellow creatures, not to say utterly godless to their heavenly Father. The cases like that of the well-bred young lady, described above, are relatively few, fatally defective as they are. This dreadful reign of sin in this world continues in spite of great obstacles, such as God's judgments and threatenings, and laborious efforts to curb it in the way of governments, restrictive laws and penalties, schools, family discipline, and churches. This sinning of human beings begins more or less as soon as the child's faculties are so developed as to qualify him for sinning intentionally. "The wicked go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." Now, a uniform

result must proceed from a regular prior cause--there must be original sin in man's nature.

Even the great rationalistic philosopher, Immanuel Kant, believed and taught this doctrine. His argument is, that when men act in the aggregate and in national masses, they show out their real native dispositions, because in these concurrent actions they are not restrained by public opinion and by human laws restricting individual actions, and they do not feel immediate personal responsibility for what they do. The actions of men in the aggregate, therefore, shows what man's heart really is. Now, then, what are the morals of the nations towards each other and towards God? Simply those of foxes, wolves, tigers, and atheists. What national senate really and humbly tries to please and obey God in its treatment of neighbor nations? What nation trusts its safety simply to the justice of its neighbors? Look at the great standing armies and fleets! Though the nation may include many God-fearing and righteous persons, when is that nation ever seen to forego a profitable aggression upon the weak, simply because it is unjust before God? These questions are unanswerable.

In the third place, all natural men, the decent and genteel just as much as the vile, show this absolute opposition of heart to God's will, and preference for self-will in some sinful acts and by rejecting the gospel. This they do invariably, knowingly, willfully, and with utter obstinacy, until they are made willing in the day of God's power. They know with Perfect clearness that the gospel requirements of faith, trust, repentance, endeavors after sincere obedience, God's righteous law, prayer, praise, and love to him, are reasonable and right. Outward objects or inducements are constantly presented to their souls, which are of infinite moment, and ought to be absolutely omnipotent over right hearts. These objects include the unspeakable love of God in Christ in giving his Son to die for his enemies, which ought to melt the heart to gratitude in an instant; the inexpressible advantages and blessings of an immortal heaven, secured by immediate faith, and the unutterable, infinite horrors of an everlasting hell, incurred by final unbelief, and risked to an awful degree, even by temporary hesitation. And these latter considerations appeal not only to moral conscience, but to that natural selfishness which remains in full force in unbelievers. Nor could doubts concerning these gospel truths, even if sincere and reasonably grounded to some extent, explain or excuse this neglect. For faith, and obedience, and the worship and the love of God, are self-evidently right and good for men, whether these awful gospel facts be true or not. He who believes is acting on the safe side in that he loses nothing, but gains something whichever way the event may go; whereas neglect of the gospel will have incurred an infinite mischief, with no possible gain should Christianity turn out to be true.

In such cases reasonable men always act, as they are morally bound to do, upon the safe side, under the guidance of even a slight probability. Why do not doubting men act thus on the safe side, even if it were a doubtful case (which it is not)? Because their dispositions are absolutely fixed and determined against godliness. Now, what result do we see from the constant application of these immense persuasives to the hearts of natural men? They invariably put them off; sometimes at the cost of temporary uneasiness or agitation, but they infallibly put them off, preferring, as long as they dare, to gratify self-will at the known risk of plain duty and infinite blessedness. Usually they make this ghastly suicidal and wicked choice with complete coolness, quickness, and ease! They attempt to cover from their own consciences the folly and wickedness of their decision by the fact they can do it so coolly and unfeelingly. My common sense tells me that this very circumstance is the most awful and ghastly proof of the reality and power of original sin in them. If this had not blinded them, they would be horrified at the very coolness with which they can outrage themselves and their Savior. I see two men willfully murder each his enemy. One has given the fatal stab in great agitation, after agonizing hesitations, followed by pungent remorse. He is not yet an adept in murder. I see the other man drive his knife into the breast of his helpless victim promptly, coolly, calmly, jesting while he does it, and then cheerfully eat his food with his bloody knife. This is no longer a man, but a fiend.

But the great proof is the Scripture. The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, asserts this original sin and decisive ungodliness of will of all fallen men. Gen. vi. 3: "My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh (carnally minded)." Again, chap. vi. 5: "God saw that every imagination of the man's heart was only evil continually." After the terrors of the flood, God's verdict on the survivors was still the same. Chap. viii. 21: "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

Job, probably the earliest sacred writer, asks, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." (Chap. xiv. 4.) David says: "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Ps. li. 5.) Prophet asks (Jer. xiii 23), "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." Jeremiah says, chap. xvii. 9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." What does desperately mean? In the New Testament Christ says (John iii, 4 and 5), "That which is born of the flesh is flesh;" and "Except ye be born again ye cannot see the kingdom of God." The Pharisees' hearts (decent moral men) are like unto whited sepulchers, which appear

beautifully outwardly, but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Does Christ exaggerate, and slander decent people?

Peter tells us (Acts viii. 23) that the spurious believer is "in the gall oesented to the soul, become weak and trite from vain repetition. The other is, that men's active appetences grow stronger continually by their own indulgence. Here, then, is the case: The gospel when presented to the sensitive boy must have had much more force than it could have to the old man after it had grown stale to him by fifty years of vain repetition. The old man's love of sin must have grown greatly stronger than the boy's by fifty years of constant indulgence. Now how comes it, that a given moral influence which was too weak to overcome the boy's sinfulness has overcome the old man's carnality when the influences had become so much weaker and the resistance to it so much stronger. This is impossible. It was the finger of God, and not the mere moral influence, which wrought the mighty change. Let us suppose that fifty years ago the reader had seen me visit his rural sanctuary, when the grand oaks which now shade it were but lithe saplings. He saw me make an effort to tear one of them with my hands from its seat; but it proved too strong for me. Fifty years after, he and I meet at the same sacred spot, and he sees me repeat my attempt upon the same tree, now grown to be a monarch of the grove. He will incline to laugh me to scorn: "He attempted that same tree fifty years ago, when he was in his youthful prime and it was but a sapling, but he could not move it. Does the old fool think to rend it from its seat now' when age has so diminished his muscle, and the sapling has grown to a mighty tree?" But let us suppose that the reader saw that giant of the grove come up in my aged hands. He would no longer laugh. He would stand awe-struck. He would conclude that this must be the hand of God, not of man. How vain is it to seek to break the force of this demonstration by saying that at last the moral influence of the gospel had received sufficient accession from attendant circumstances, from clearness and eloquence of presentation, to enable it to do its work? What later eloquence of the pulpit can rival that of the Christian mother presenting the cross in the tender accents of love. Again, the story of the cross, the attractions of heaven, ought to be immense, even when stated in the simplest words of childhood. How trivial and paltry are any additions which mere human rhetoric can make to what ought to be the infinite force of the naked truth.

But the surest proof is that of Scripture. This everywhere asserts that the sinner's regeneration is by sovereign, almighty grace. One class of texts presents those which describe the sinner's prior condition as one of "blindness," Eph. iv. 18; "of stony heartedness," Ezek. xxxvi. 26; "of impotency," Rom. v. 6; "of enmity," Rom. viii. 7; "of inability," John vi. 44, and Rom. vii. 18; "of deadness," Eph. ii. 1-5. Let no one

exclaim that these are "figures of speech." Surely the Holy Spirit, when resorting to figures for the very purpose of giving a more forcible expression to truth, does not resort to a deceitful rhetoric! Surely he selects his figures because of the correct parallel between them and his truth! Now, then, the blind man cannot take part in the very operation which is to open his eyes. The hard stone cannot be a source of softness. The helpless paralytic cannot begin his own restoration. Enmity against God cannot choose love for him, The dead corpse of Lazarus could have no agency in recalling the vital spirit into itself. After Christ's almighty power restored it, the living man could respond to the Savior's command and rise and come forth.

The figures which describe the almighty change prove the same truth. It is described (Ps. cxix. 18) as an opening of the blind eyes to the law; as a new creation; (Ps. li. 10; Eph. ii. 5) as a new birth; (John iii. 3) as a quickening or resurrection (making alive); Eph. 1 18, and ii. 10). The man blind of cataract does not join the surgeon in couching his own eye; nor does the sunbeam begin and perform the surgical operation; that must take place in order for the light to enter and produce vision.

The timber is shaped by the carpenter; it does not shape itself, and does not become an implement until he gives it the desired shape. The infant does not procreate itself, but must be born of its parents in order to become a living agent.

The corpse does not restore life to itself; after life is restored it becomes a living agent. Express scriptures teach the same doctrine. In Jer. xxxi. 18, Ephraim is heard praying thus: "Turn thou to me and I shall be turned." In John 1.12, we are taught that believers are born "not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God." In John vi. 44, Christ assures us that "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." And in chap. xv. 16, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit." In Eph. ii. 10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which Christ hath fore ordained that we should walk in them."

It is objected that this doctrine of almighty grace would destroy man's free-agency. This is not true. All men whom God does not regenerate retain their natural freedom unimpaired by anything which he does to them.

It is true that these use their freedom, as in variably, as voluntarily, by choosing their self-will and unregenerate state. But in doing this they choose in perfect accordance with their own preference, and this the only kind of free-agency known to men of common sense. The

unregenerate choose just what they prefer, and therefore choose freely; but so long as not renewed by almighty grace, they always prefer to remain unregenerate, because it is fallen man's nature. The truly regenerate do not lose their free-agency by effectual calling, but regain a truer and higher freedom; for the almighty power which renews them does not force them into a new line of conduct contrary to their own preferences, but reverses the original disposition itself which regulates preference. Under this renewed disposition they now act just as freely as when they were voluntary sinners, but far more reasonably and happily. For they act the new and right preference, which almighty grace has put in place of the old one.

It is objected, again, that unless the agent has exercised his free-will in the very first choice or adoption of the new moral state, there could be no moral quality and no credit for the series of actions proceeding therefrom, because they would not be voluntary. This is expressly false. True, the new-born sinner can claim no merit for that sovereign change of will in which his conversion began, because it was not his own choosing, or doing, but God's; yet the cavil is untrue; the moral quality and merit of a series of actions does not depend on the question, whether the agent put himself into the moral state whence they flow, by a previous volition of his own starting from a moral indifference.

The only question is, whether his actions are sincere, and the free expressions of a right disposition, for:

1. Then Adam could have no morality; for we are expressly told that God "created him upright." (Eccles. vii. 29.)
2. Jesus could have had no meritorious morality, because being conceived of the Holy Ghost he was born that holy thing. (Matt. I. 20; Luke I. 35)
3. God himself could have no meritorious holiness, because he was and is eternally and unchangeably holy. He never chose himself into a state of holiness, being eternally and necessarily holy. Here, then, this miserable objection runs into actual blasphemy. On this point John Wesley is as expressly with us as Jonathan Edwards. See Wesley, On Original Sin.

III. GOD'S ELECTION.

In our Confession, Chapter III., Section iii., verses 4 and 7, we have this description of it: 3d. "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life and others foreordained to everlasting death." IV. "These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly an herd, Because the perdition of the Edomite race from all gospel

means must have resulted in the perdition of the individuals. For, says Paul: "How could they believe on him of whom they have not heard?"

This is the right place to notice the frequent mistake when we say that God's election is sovereign and not conditioned on his foresight of the elected man's piety. Many pretend to think that we teach God has no reason at all for his choice; that we make it an instance of sovereign divine caprice! We teach no such thing. It would be impiety. Our God is too wise and righteous to have any caprices. He has a reasonable motive for every one of his purposes; and his omniscience shows him it is always the best reason. But he is not bound to publish it to us. God knew he had a reason for preferring the sinner, Jacob, to the sinner Esau. But this reason could not have been any foreseeing merit of Jacob's piety by two arguments: The choice was made before the children were born. There never was any piety in Jacob to foresee, except what was to follow after as an effect of Jacob's election. Esau appears to have been an open, hard-mouthed, profane person. Jacob, by nature, a mean, sneaking hypocrite and supplanter. Probably God judged their personal merits as I do, that personally Jacob was a more detestable sinner than Esau. Therefore, on grounds of foreseen personal deserts, God could never have elected either of them. But his omniscience saw a separate, independent reason why it was wisest to make the worse man the object of his infinite mercy, while leaving the other to his own profane choice. Does the Arminian now say that I must tell him what that reason was? I answer, I do not know, God has not told me. But I know He had a good reason, because he is God. Will any man dare to say that because omniscience could not find its reason in the foreseen merits of Jacob, therefore it could find none at all in the whole infinite sweep of its Providence and wisdom? This would be arrogance run mad and near to blasphemy.

One more argument for election remains: Many human beings have their salvation or ruin practically decided by providential events in their lives. The argument is, that since these events are sovereignly determined by God's providence, the election, or preterition of their souls is thereby virtually decided, Take two instances: Here is a willful, impenitent man who is down with fever and is already delirious. Will he die or get well? God's providence will decide that. "In his hands our breath is, and his are all our ways." (Dan. v. 23.) If he dies this time he is too delirious to believe and repent; if he recovers, he may attend revival meetings and return to God. The other instance is, that of dying infants. This is peculiarly deadly to the Arminian theory, because they say so positively that all humans who die in infancy are saved. (And they slander us Presbyterians by charging that we are not positive enough on that point, and that we

believe in the "damnation of infants.") Well, here is a human infant three months old. Will it die of croup, or will it live to be a man? God's providence will decide that. If it dies, the Arminian is certain its soul is gone to heaven, and therefore was elected of God to go there. If it is to grow to be a man, the Arminian says he may exercise his freewill to be a Korah, Dalthan, Abiram, or Judas. But the election of the baby who dies cannot be grounded in God's foresight of its faith and repentance, because there was none to foresee before it entered glory; the little soul having redeemed by sovereign grace without these means.

But there is that sentence in our Confession, Chapter X., Section iii.: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth." Our charitable accusers will have it that the antithesis which we imply to the words "elect infants dying in infancy" is, that there are non-elect infants dyi