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**Free and Impartial Thoughts, on
the Sovereignty of God, The
Doctrines of Election,
Reprobation, and Original Sin:
Humbly Addressed To all who
Believe and Profess those
Doctrines.**

Richard Finch

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THE P R E F A C E

I Cannot find, upon the most impartial Retrospection of the Argument, any Reason to alter my Sentiments concerning it; and as it is a Matter of the greatest Importance, 'tis hoped that those who maintain the Doctrines of Election, &c. will afford it all the Weight and Consideration it deserves. But, if there be any among them, who will hear no Reason or Argument whatever, and are sure, only because they are sure, I Have little or no Hopes to prevail with them, to give me a fair Hearing, or to think candidly and impartially about it. But as there are among them, some, who no doubt will allow the Possibility of their being in an Error; to all such I address my self, and beseech them, as much as possible to lay aside Prejudice and Partiality; wisely considering, that many of their Fore-fathers maintained some erroneous Doctrines, with as much Zeal, and Integrity, as they their Descendants now do the Doctrines of Election, &c. and yet saw Occasion to renounce them afterwards.

There is Reason to fear, the just Liberty I have taken with the Doctrines of Election, &c. may, by some, be deem'd Blasphemy against Godhimself; but I am far from intending any such thing. These Doctrines (I think) on the contrary, are in them selves nothing better than blasphemous, tho' the Intentions of some who maintain them, be ever so devout and sincere: And if an Impeachment of Doctrines, which, instead of preserving God's Moral Character, robs him of all that is dear and valuable, or that can render him lovely and adorable to Man, be accounted Blasphemy, the Ignorance and Bigotry of those, who judge after that Manner, ought much to be lamented. It is a melancholy Truth, that where Prejudice, in favour of false Principles, has had early and frequent Access to the Mind, it too often shuts the Ear against Reason and Truth; and 'tis very hard to persuade such People to enter at all, and much less impartially, into the Merits of an Argument advanced against them; nor indeed is the Liberty of Thought on Religious Subjects, duly inculcated in Religious Assemblies: For, the Teachers of Christianity, tho' they are seldom averse to give us the Compliment of a just Liberty of thinking for ourselves, are but too apt to set the Terrors of the Lord in array against Unbelievers; tho' perhaps their Dissent may sometimes be only the innocent Effect, of the best Examination they are able to make. And if there be any thing worthy of Notice, in what I have advanced, I hereby intreat all, into whose Hands this Treatise may come, not to be terrified, by any such popular Arts, from

making a thorough Examination for themselves; on the other hand, I am altogether as willing to set right, in whatever I may have erred, or been mistaken.

'Tis well known, the 17th Article of our own National Church, greatly favours the Doctrines of Election and Reprobation; and it is also generally believed, that the Better Part of our Clergy entirely disapprove these Doctrines, and would very readily assist in expunging them out of their Creed; which would render their Consciences much easier, than now they are, or can be, under a Subscription in a Sense so very qualified and remote from the natural Intent and Meaning of the Article.

Experience makes it evident, that Education is able to retain Men of the Brightest Understanding, in the Belief of the Greatest Absurdities. But, that Men of Learning, Ingenuity and Experience, who have lived perhaps to the Age of fifty, in the Disbelief of the Doctrines of Election, &c. should after that sincerely embrace them, is to me Matter of great Astonishment; yet this I am inform'd is really the Case, with regard to one of the most ingenious Divines, our Metropolis has to boast of. One Reason may perhaps be alledged, for such an unexpected Alteration of Sentiment, viz. That tho' we disbelieve these Doctrines, because they are absurd, yet we hold at the same time, others, equally repugnant to Reason, and to Common Sense; and certainly we may as reasonably embrace the one as retain the other. Besides, with what reasonable Expectation of Success could such a Man as this sit down to argue with another of absurd Principles, when he himself might be so easily abash'd and put to Silence, by an Appeal to other Principles, of his own, equally absurd and inexplicable. The best way then, instead of embracing a fresh, absurd, Principle of Faith, is, to renounce the old. I would not willingly Offend Any, by a special Application to particular Societies and Doctrines: let but every Man make an honest Application to himself, and the Articles of Faith he professes, and the Work of Reformation will, I am persuaded, gain something thereby. And that, not only these Doctrines, but every other absurd Principle of Faith, which either Ignorance, or Design, may have introduced into the Christian church, to the Dishonour of God, the Burthen and Reproach of Human Nature, may be utterly exploded, is the incessant Wish, and earnest Desire, of

The Author.

Free and Impartial THOUGHTS, &c.

CHRISTIANITY having been instituted, by its great Author and Publisher, for the Benefit and Advantage of Mankind, it is pity we should so greatly differ, concerning what *Genuine Christianity* is; if the *Holy Bible*, as we generally agree, was designed to lead us to the true Knowledge of God, and to be a standing and perpetual Rule of *Faith* and *Manners* to Men, it must surely have been greatly corrupted since the primitive Times of the Gospel, or the *Explication* of it designedly left to a more excellent and superior Director: For the seeming Contradictions, and Multiplicity of obscure Passages, wherewith it abounds, shew plainly it could never, in its present Condition, be a Rule of Faith, &c. becoming an all-wise and perfect Being, to give to rational Creatures. Every *good Man, Society, and State*, study Perspicuity in all their *Rules, Orders, and Statutes*, dispensed to their *Families, Members, and Subjects*: and can we suppose, that He, who is perfect in Knowledge, would, in the Dispensation of his Laws, take less care of the everlasting State of his immortal Creature *Man*? Yet it is plain, we differ in our Sentiments of Religion, and greatly too, for want, as I sincerely hope, of the Knowledge of better Helps, to direct our Inquiries, in Matters, the true Knowledge whereof, is of so considerable Moment. Therefore,

I intend, in the Course of this Debate, to descant *freely*, on the Doctrines of *Divine Sovereignty, Election, Reprobation, and Original Sin*; and also, on the Arguments which some ingenious Gentlemen have used to support them. But I hope (with regard to the *Authors* I may possibly name) to be perfectly decent, and to treat them with all becoming Respect and Deference, as I think Men of Integrity, Learning and Abilities deserve; who, though in some Points they may err, and hold Doctrines in their own Nature and Tendency altogether subversive of Religion and Morality, do nevertheless not perceive them to have these Tendencies, and are therefore by *no Means* chargeable with them. Yet, as touching the *Doctrines* themselves, I shall presume to speak freely, both in regard to their Nature, and what appears to me to be their genuine Fruits and Effects.

It is with me an establish'd Truth, that the mistaken Notion of some *learned Men*, concerning the *Sovereignty* of the *Deity*, has given these Doctrines a more favourable Acceptance in the World, than otherwise they would, or could, ever have met with; and notwithstanding all the Pains and Arguments these Gentlemen have bestowed, to reconcile their Doctrines to our common Sense of *Right* and *Wrong*, it is plain, that, at *bottom*, this is the grand governing Principle. For, when their Attempts to reconcile these Doctrines with common Sense and Equity fail, they have immediate Recourse to God's *Sovereignty*, and even go so far, at least in Effect, as to deny there is *any* intrinsick Difference in Things themselves, as shall be made appear from their most approved Writers, whenever they are pleased to demand it: But as this Principle of *Sovereignty* is most certainly their strong Hold, I shall therefore endeavour to go to the Depth of this Argument; and shew, in the first Place, how greatly they misapprehend the Nature of this *Attribute*; and, in the second Place, granting it to be as they say, I shall then shew the *precarious* and *miserable* Condition of all Mankind, not excepting the Elect themselves, under the Government of such an arbitrary Being.

To begin with the first. That God is a *Sovereign*, we readily allow: But it will not therefore follow, he is *morally capable* of doing any thing, in its *own Nature*, immoral or unjust. All religious Debates are allowed to be best determinable by the divine Attributes; and yet nothing is more common, than to single out, and lay the greatest Stress on, that Attribute alone, which appears best to suit our own particular Opinions: which, however innocent our Intention may be, is, I think, in itself, a very erroneous and unwarrantable Procedure; for as God is *all-wise* and *good*, as well as *almighty* and *independent*, it is, in the Nature of Things, impossible (and therefore we should never admit it possible) he should be capable (in a moral Sense, I mean) of exerting any one particular Attribute in *Opposition* to, or *Diminution* from, another. A *Sovereign* he is, nor can any Creature whatever dispute his *unlimited* and *uncontroulable* Power over his *whole Creation*. But Power alone, without Wisdom and Goodness to make a right Use and Application of it, may be perfect *Frenzy*, and run into the greatest Latitude of *Folly* and *Tyranny*. It is, if I may be allowed the Comparison, like a *Vessel* that has lost its Helm, continually exposed to the tossing of Winds and Waves. To talk, therefore,

of *mere Sovereign Pleasure*, without Regard to the proper Reason or Fitness of Things, so far operating and bring in the *Divine Mind* (and which is nothing more than the Presence and Operation of his own Wisdom) in order to prefer what, in its own Nature, is *best*, and *fittest* to be done, is excluding from the Deity, those *more* blessed and *valuable* Perfections of *Wisdom* and *Goodness*, and establishing in their room, and at their Expence, mere Sovereign Power alone. *Physically speaking* indeed, we allow God can do Evil itself; but the moral Perfections of his Nature, are to us an *infallible* and *unshaken Security*, that he *never will* do it. *Man* being an impotent and fallible Creature, liable, not only to mistake the true Nature and importance of Things, but when he does understand his Duty rightly, liable also, thro' the Prevalence of *Habit* and *Passion*, to be very backward and defective in performing it, must necessarily be subject to such Laws, as contain in them Rewards and Punishments, proper to influence his *Hopes* and his *Fears*.

But as God, on the contrary, is a Being of all possible and infinite Perfections; an exact Knowledge of what we call *Right* and *Wrong*, *Just* and *Unjust*, ever hath, and always will exit in the *Divine Mind*, and be to him a perfect, constant, and invariable Rule of Action, in relation to his Creatures. He that is *infinite* in Knowledge, cannot but know, at all Times, and under the most (to us) difficult and perplex'd Circumstances of Things, what in its *own Nature* is *best*, and *fittest* to be done; and, being void of all Bias, Prejudice, and Passion, cannot but approve of what is *right* and *best*; and being likewise *Almighty*, no Power can possibly interrupt, or prevent what he determined to accomplish: So that it is *morally impossible*, that God should do an evil Thing, These Truths are so deducible from each other, and in themselves so evident, to all unbiassed and inquisitive Minds, that one would wonder to find Men, of Learning and Integrity, give into the contrary Sentiments; which, in Effect they do, who hold Doctrines *naturally subversive* of these fundamental Truths, as all certainly do, who depart from the moral Good and Fitness of Things, and resolve all into *mere sovereign Pleasure* alone, *independent* of Wisdom and Goodness; which must ever be at hand to *cooperate* with, and govern the Exertion of, their favourite Attribute, *sovereign Power* itself; or, if they do not expressly affirm this, they do by another Method the very same thing; and that is, by

denying, in Effect, the *intrinsic Difference* of Good and Evil, which, according to them, has no Foundation in the *Nature* and Relations of Things, but takes its Rise, only, from the mere Will and Appointment of the *Deity*. But if all Things are in themselves equally Good, where is the Use to *appoint*, or the Sense of talking about it? Wisdom and Goodness must, according to this Notion, be idle and unmeaning Sounds, without Sense or Service. But alas! the natural Consequence of maintaining Tenets, so repugnant to common Sense, is seldom less than running into and embracing other Absurdities, in themselves equally great with what they are brought to defend, And here, as some of these Gentlemen are exalted, and I hope deservedly, to the Dignity of Teachers in the *Christian Church*, they will, I hope, permit me to ask them a Question or two, which I should, on almost any other Occasion, blush to ask any rational Man, *viz.* If they do not perceive an intrinsic Beauty and Excellence in Virtue, as opposed to Vice; independent of all *positive* or arbitrary Appointment, tho' of the *Deity* itself; and whether, besides the Commands of God, (which to be sure are of high Importance, and ought ever to be urged with great Strength and Energy) they do not also *press* upon their Hearers, the Practice of Virtue, and endeavour to recommend, and inforce it on the Mind, from its *own* native Charms? But to make this Matter, still, if possible, more evident; let us suppose the present excellent Order of Things inverted, and that God, of his own mere Pleasure, had given Mankind quite contrary Laws, and commanded *Rebellion, Murder, Ingratitude*, and all Manner of Intemperance and Debauchery, instead of their *opposite virtues*; would the same Fitness, Beauty, and Propriety, appear to these Gentlemen, as there now does, in *Virtue*? If not, from whence the Difference arises, let them answer.

As God is an infinite Mind or Spirit, perfectly acquainted, at every Instant of Time, with whatever *hath been, is, or shall be*; and all Things *possible to be*; 'tis evident, that all possible Relations of Persons and Things are fully known to him; and that all *moral and divine* Obligations, arising from the Relation we stand in to God, and to each other, did, in their own Nature, *previous* to actual Law or Commandment, exist; because the one was in Time, and the other Eternal; one commenced only (at best) with the *Being and Beginning* of Creatures, the other was from all Eternity, *co-existent* with the

Divine Wisdom itself; and such an inseparable Concomitant therewith, that, in regard to the *Divine Being*, himself, it was absolutely impossible, but that, on his creating such a Rank of Beings as we are, *moral* and *religious* Obligations must have been *invariably* and *unalterably* the same; and if, as these Men teach, God's having commanded the Practice of Virtue, be its peculiar Sanction, and that *alone* which distinguishes it from Vice or Evil; then, by the same or as good an Argument, his commanding Light in the Beginning, is all the Reason we have for esteeming Light and Darkness different, (as they really are) the one being the actual Pretence of a real Body, and the other a mere Name, to signify its Absence; not that Vice is therefore a mere Name, to signify the Absence of Virtue, for Comparisons seldom hold good in *every* minute Particular; but there is a Parity between the two Cases, sufficient to justify my bringing in the one, as an Illustration of the other. There is no Knowledge *more certain*, than what Mankind commonly have of Good and Evil; and he who, in order to serve any private Scheme of Religion, goes about to depreciate this Knowledge, robs Mankind of all Truth and Certainty whatever, and in the End subjects his own darling Schemes to the same Uncertainty; for if we cannot judge of the Fitness, of plain moral Truth and Duty, neither can we of any Scheme of Religion; especially such as hang together more by Art and human Contrivance, than by Reason or Revelation.

Being very desirous to get all the Information I could, concerning the Matter in Debate; I have attentively read over Mr. *Cole's* Treatise on the *Sovereignty* of God. I know 'tis thought an unanswerable Performance; and, so far as it regards general Christianity, it is worth every Christian's serious Notice: But as to the Doctrine it was wrote to support, it leaves it (in my Judgment) no better than it found it; but is miserably weak, and defective, as to any Thing that looks like sound Reason, or true Argument; and amounts to no more than this *poor Assertion*, *That because God is a Sovereign, he may do what he pleases*: And, from the Instances he brings from Scripture, 'tis plain, that Mr. *Cole* himself pays as *little* Regard to the intrinsic Worth and Excellence of Things, as is done by many of his Brethren. The manner in which he has been pleased to give us the Story of *Jacob* and *Esau*, proves the Truth of this Observation, I have no great Inclination to spend Time in explaining *hard Passages* of Scripture,

(tho' if any thing of that kind can be serviceable, or deem'd excellent, 'tis Mr. *Taylor* of *Norwich* his Book on *Original Sin*,) or to trespass on the Reader's Patience, by throwing one Text of *hard* and *uncertain* Meaning against another; for by this means the Controversy hath been needlessly prolonged. Where the Scriptures are *plain*, *positive* and *reasonable*, their Authority ought to be conscientiously adhered to: But as this is not always the Case, the *next* Thing to knowing what is the *true Meaning* of any particular Text of Scripture is, to know what it neither *does* nor *can* possibly mean; in which Case, the Divine Attributes, and the Nature and Reason, or (if you please) Fitness of Things, is the best Rule. We *cannot*, it is impossible we *should*, understand the certain determinate Meaning of any Text of Scripture *better*, if altogether *so well*, as we do *know* certainly, that God is *just* and *good*, and *know* also as clearly, what *Justice* and *Goodness* mean, when applied to the *Deity*, as we do, when we apply them to *ourselves*. And this Rule, if duly observed, would be abundantly sufficient, to set aside many Interpretations of Scripture, too commonly admitted upon this and the like Occasions. And, besides this never failing Argument (to all who attend duly to its Force) it is worth while, just to remark, that though, as the *Bible* now stands, there are in it (as we must acknowledge) some Passages, which (especially at first sight) seem to favour the Doctrine of *Sovereignty*, &c. yet as it is possible, nay sometimes easy, to give them *another interpretation*, and the general Scope and Tenor of the Scripture being agreeable to such an Interpretation, we have abundantly more Reason to *reject*, than to *admit* of the Sense, in which these Gentlemen are pleased to understand and expound many Texts of the *Bible*, relating to this and other affirmative Points.

I would not, as I observed before, presume to impose on the Reader's Time and Patience, by entering unnecessarily into the scriptural Part of the Argument; yet I must beg Leave, to make now and then an Observation or two as I go along: And the first Thing that falls in my way is, the Story of *Jacob* and *Esau*, and the Account which Mr. *Cole* gives of it. He not only relates the Story, but assures us, that *Jacob's* obtaining the Blessing was of Divine Appointment, and (what is more extraordinary) that the *Falsehood* and *Fraud* he practised to accomplish it, was all of God's own immediate Direction; and this he gives as an Instance of God's *Sovereignty*, and pro-

ceeding contrary to the moral Fitness of Things, and the Nature of those Laws he hath given to Man. That God intended *Jacob* the *Blessing*, or preferred him to *Esau*, I readily grant; but cannot admit it to be inferred from thence, that the Means, by which it was, as we reckon, accomplished, were *Divine* also: There is a more natural or (at least) more justifiable way of accounting for the whole Matter. According to the History, it seems plain, that *Rebecca* only, and not her Husband, was privy to this Designation of the *Deity*: she had upon Inquiry (when with Child) received such an Assurance from the Lord; which might be the *first Cause* of her preferring *Jacob* to *Esau*, and which in Time, 'tis probable, grew up into a much greater Degree of *Partiality* and *Fondness*: All this Time the good Old *Patriarch*, her Husband, seems to have been entirely unacquainted with the Affair. And when the Time drew nigh, in which, according (as some think) to Custom, he was about to *bless* his *eldest Son*, *Rebecca* then grew diffident of the Accomplishment of the Promise made in *Jacob's* Behalf, and applied herself to the Means, which the Text tells us was used on that Occasion. As to the Authority those Heads of Families had to *confer Benefits* on their Offspring, by way of *Blessing*, though I shall not now much contend about it, yet give me Leave to make a few Observations. It don't appear to me that *Isaac*, in giving his *Blessing*, did so properly or so much bestow it on the *Person* of *Jacob* present, as he did on the *Person* of *Esau* absent; because it is the Intention which ought principally to be regarded, and *Esau* undoubtedly was intended. Again, this way of blessing, if considered in itself as a mere Tradition, could be *no more* efficacious, than what now prevails in some Parts of the *Christian Church*. All true Authority of this kind (if any there be) must result from *immediate Inspiration and Command*; and whether *Isaac* had these Qualifications, while *Jacob* stood before him, personating *Esau*, is a Matter of no small Doubt and Dispute. He was ('tis evident) much surprised at the *Cheat*, put on him by his *Wife* and *Son*, and would doubtless very willingly have given *Esau* the Preference, according to his first Intention; but something *supernatural* seems now to have seized and satisfied him, that *Jacob* was the *Person* intended; for he cries out, "I have blessed him, yea and he shall be blessed." And this latter Assurance, and the Energy and Satisfaction wherewith the Words were pronounced, I take *rather* to have been the *true Blessing* than the *other*. For, as the Reason of *Jacob's* Dissimulation was intirely

owing to his Mother's Diffidence and Impatience; so, there is no Doubt to be made, but that the *Almighty* himself would, had she not interfered, have brought it about in a manner becoming his *Holiness*, and not by *Falsehood*, *Deceit*, and *Dissimulation*. *Religion* can never be *more* dishonoured, or the Despensations of God to Mankind receive *greater* Reproach, than when *Divine Purposes* are (under God's immediate Direction) said to be accomplish'd by Methods in themselves *evil* and *immoral*, and altogether opposite to His Commands. Hath he forbid us Lying, under the *Penalty* of *Hell-Fire*, and shall he himself practise it, or immediately influence another to do it, for the sake of bringing to pass some Event, which he could as easily have accomplish'd, by Methods purely righteous and honourable! And had *Jacob* never been prompted, or attempted to obtain the Blessing in the manner he did attempt it, 'tis more than probable, that God, who removed *Isaac's* Surprise, and caused him to break forth as he did, "I have blessed him, yea and he shall be blessed," would never have permitted or impowered *Isaac*, to have *blessed Esau*, in an *effectual* manner beyond his Brother: Or if a mere Pronouncing of Words, when uttered as a Blessing from the Heads of Families, was in itself an *irreversible Blessing*, and *Isaac* had attempted to bestow it on *Esau*, God no doubt would have stayed his Mouth by *Intimations within*; as he did, on another Occasion, the *Hand of Abraham*, by an Angel without: Provided, I say, it be allowed, that a *formal Blessing*, from the Mouth of *Isaac*, was necessary to confirm on *Jacob* those superior Privileges, which God had designed for him; and that this Interpretation of the Text is more honourable, and better becoming the Truth and Majesty of the *Divine Being*. I appeal not to Reason only, but to Mr. *Cole* himself: For whatever Influence Prejudice, or Enthusiasm, may have on some Minds, there are certain Seasons, wherein Truth will display itself to the Realm and Understanding of Mankind, and extort, even from the Mouths of those, who sometimes oppose her, the most ample Concessions in her Favour. Take the following as an Instance—*Cole's Sovereignty of God*, Page 41, 2d Edit. "To this also might be added the strict Injunctions that God hath laid upon the subordinate Dispensers of his Law; as namely, to judge the People with just Judgment, not to wrest Judgment, nor respect Persons; yea, he curseth them that pervert Judgment, and will surely reprove them that accept Persons; and shall mortal Man

be more just than God? will he, under such Penalties, command Men to do thus, and not do so himself?"

The Argument is undoubtedly equally applicable to the Sin of *Ly-ing*, or indeed to any Sin whatever; and I appeal to every unprejudiced Reader, if any Thing more to the Purpose could be urged, against his own Account of the Affair between *Jacob* and *Esau*, or even against the Doctrine itself, which he writes his Book to support: and this, in Conjunction with my foregoing Arguments, may, I hope, be Answer sufficient for the Use they make of *all other* parallel Places of Scripture.

By this Concession 'tis plain, that Justice and Goodness in God are, by this Author, considered the same as in us; how else were it possible, to understand what the Laws of God truly mean? *Be you perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect*, is a plain Indication (taking in the Context) of the moral Perfections of the Divine Nature, in Part apparent to us, as the Text observes, from his admirable Bounty in the Creation; *He causeth his Sun to rise on the Evil and on the Good, and sendeth his Rain on the Just and the Unjust*. Though at other Times, when these Gentlemen are hard pinched with the Iniquity and Injustice of their Doctrines, they apply for Refuge to the *Sovereignty* of God, and give strong Intimations, that *Justice* and *Goodness*, when applied to him, are mere unmeaning Sounds, which at best signify, what mere Sovereignty pleases to do, and that when applied to Man, they signify quite another Thing. And this naturally leads me to the second Thing I proposed to consider, *viz.* That allowing the Doctrine of *Election* to be, as they say, resolveable into God's Sovereignty; that God is just such a Sovereign, as this Doctrine supposes, and these Gentlemen take him to be; that they have his Word for their own Election and Salvation; yet even then, there could be no manner of Certainty as to Religion, no Dependance on the Promises and Threatnings of the Gospel; and consequently, the supposed Elect must *beat the Air*, and run at the same or as great Uncertainties, as any other Persons whatever, under the Government of such an arbitrary Being.

I have, to avoid Dispute, proposed this Argument more to the Advantage of the Elect, than I was strictly obliged to do, by allowing them to be absolutely certain, that God has told them, that they

are his Elect, and that he will give them eternal Life; which, allowing the Doctrine of *Election* to be true, is generally much more than they can prove, either to themselves, or to others: allowing, I say, the Doctrine of *Election* to be clearly revealed in Scripture, there will be this Difficulty behind, as to the certain Marks of being of that Number. The Scripture must also as clearly reveal the Marks, as it does the Doctrine, or we shall not be able to apply with any Certainty to ourselves. Is believing the Doctrine, &c. and thinking myself one of this happy Number, a Rule sufficient to abide by? If so, no Man who has this Faith, concerning the *Doctrine* and *himself*, can ever depart from it. Yet, there have been many Instances of Persons, zealous in that way, who saw Occasion afterwards to renounce the Doctrine itself, and with it that *imaginary* and *ungrounded Conceit* of their being, for no Reason whatever, God's dear Children and Favourites, and embraced, in its room, the Doctrines of *universal Grace* and *Free-will*; and upon the best Reasons too, for as without the one, God cannot be just, so without the other, Man, being no Agent, can be no Subject of Rewards and Punishments. These very Men were before thought to be elect, by their most spiritual and best judging Brethren, who pronounced them chosen in *Christ*, and unshaken in the Faith; and so indeed they judged concerning themselves: But the Grace of God being once permitted freely to operate in the Mind, it soon expelled that Ignorance, and Narrowness of Spirit, which (even in many well meaning Persons) is the genuine Effect of such narrow Doctrines. If having this Faith be no certain Mark, because a Man may depart from it, what Proof have they? surely none: But allowing them an absolute Certainty, as to themselves, that God hath told them, in Person, that they are his Elect, it will (on their own darling Principle of Sovereignty) amount to just nothing at all; because, as a Sovereign, God may promise one thing, and intend, nay do another, or the contrary; nor can they prove, or have they the least Assurance, he will not thus deal with them, without recurring to other Principles, which will hold equally strong against the Doctrines themselves—To this Dilemma are these Gentlemen inevitably reduced; they must either give up the Doctrines, or part with any Security of Dependance on God himself, as to their own Happiness. It will be *in vain*, here, to refer to the *Goodness of God*, though, on *my* Principles, the Argument would be unanswerable; on *theirs*, it is *stark naught*, and avails nothing. And pray observe the *double*

Dealing this reduces them to; it is something like setting up *two Gods* instead of one, or, which is much the same, ascribing to the *eternal, unchangeable Being*, an inconsistent and contrary Conduct. Here is, *first*, a mere arbitrary Being, that decrees, or pretends to decree, by mere *Sovereign Pleasure* only, the Salvation of the *Elect*; but, because such a Being may as well break his Promise as keep it, here is *another* to make *good* the Promise, who invariably acts according to the moral Fitness of Things: Or, if you take it the other way, here is, *1st*, A Promise made as a mere *Sovereign*, undetermined by, and unregardful of, *all* moral Obligations; and, *2dly*, The Performance of this Promise is expected, from a Principle of Justice and Goodness; ever conformable to the moral Reason and Fitness of Things: And certainly, in either Case, it leaves Things very precarious; nor can the Promises of such a Being as this (I speak it with all possible Reverence to the true God himself) be any thing near so valuable, or fit to be depended on, as the Engagements of a good and worthy Man. And whatever these Gentlemen, to put a more plausible Out-side on their Doctrines, say, concerning the Freedom and Excellence of that State, wherein our first Father *Adam* was created, and the Possibility of his having remained perfectly innocent, and the Blessings of eternal Life, which would have been thence derived to all his Posterity, it is plain to me, they generally believe no such thing; but that, on the contrary, God absolutely *willed* and *decreed* the *Fall of Adam*, Mr. *Cole* himself, their great Advocate, is far from supposing the Condition of *Adam* to have been proper for abiding long in Obedience to the Divine Command, or that, had he stood, his Posterity would have thence become *impeccable* and *happy*: on the contrary, he represents *Adam's* Condition as a very weak and imperfect State, by no mean suited to the Temptations, which his Maker knew he would shortly be exposed to, and overcome with; and all his Posterity, *had they been tried one by one, would, it seems, have failed as he did*, Page 72. If all this does not amount to something equal to a positive Assertion, that God *willed* the Fall of *Adam*, and in Consequence of it, the Guilt and Desert of eternal Death, which is said to be thence derived, to *all* his prosperity, I do not know what is, or can be equal to it; and indeed all this, and much more, may easily be resolved into the Doctrine of God's *Sovereignty*: and whoever thinks I have misrepresented their Faith, need only consult their great apostle Mr. *Calvin*. But let me further pursue my Argument, to prove, that tho' a

Man of this *Faith* has God's *sown Word* for his Election and Salvation, he cannot, on this Principle of *mere Sovereignty*, reasonably or safely depend on it: My Reason, which is short and plain, I have already given; because God, as a *Sovereign*, may do just what he pleases, *keep* his Promises, or *break* them. There can be no Possibility of evading this Argument, without coming back to the Goodness of God; which is at once to set aside mere *Sovereign* Pleasure, and evidently recurring to the moral Fitness of Things. As much as these Gentlemen are pleased to despise this moral Fitness, and superstitiously exalt the mere Will of God in Opposition thereto; and if the *Goodness* of God proves, that he *cannot* break the Promise he has made to them of eternal Life; it is at least as strong a Proof to me, that such a good Being *could not* possibly make me for eternal Misery, or, which is the very same Thing, will or decree the Fall of *Adam*, and pass the Sentence of eternal Death on all his Posterity; the far greatest Part of whom he leaves, in this Condition, to perish everlastingly, and *miserable* me among the rest!

A Due Survey of the two Cases, or Conditions, of the Elect and Non-elect, may serve to set this Matter in a clear Light, God being in himself antecedent to the Existence of all other Beings, infinitely glorious and happy, could have no Occasion for Creatures to add to his Blessedness; all that we call *evil*, such as Cruelty and Injustice in Man, ever arises from such a *vicious* and *imperfect* State of Mind, as cannot, for that Reason, possibly belong to *Deity*. As the Sources, therefore, whence these Evils arise, cannot be in God; such a Conduct, as these Doctrines suppose, is also equally impossible to proceed from God, whose *only Intent* in creating must be, to communicate Happiness to his Creatures: Creation infers Providence, and to bring a sensible rational Being into this World; and, instead of taking *due Care* of its Safety and Happiness, to *decree* and render it eternally miserable, is in its *own Nature*, much worse than making an absolute Promise of eternal Life to any created being, and *disappointing* that Being of its Happiness, whether by annihilation, or by changing it to another State, or Mode of Being, no more happy than the present mortal Life; 'tis only a Breach of Promise, which, in such a *Sovereign*, is a mere trifle. We have *no natural* Right to Immortality, *much* less to immortal Happiness; it is the mere Effect of Divine Bounty—But, being created in a weak, dependent State, and sur-

rounded with Wants and Infirmities, we *have a natural Right* to the Care and Protection of our Maker; and tho' we allow, no *formal Promise* is made on our Behalf, yet the *very act* itself, of creating such Beings, and the Condition we *are* placed in, contains in it the *Substance* of a Promise; and we may be assured, God will have proper Regard to such Beings. If God be gracious enough to *give* eternal Life, to which we have not the *least* natural Right, can he possibly with-hold that which, from our Make and Dependance on him, we have just Reason to expect? and how Much more impossible is it, that he should make us for everlasting Misery! To make *one Man* for Damnation, is much worse, than promising eternal Life to another, and breaking that Promise; he that does the former, cannot be depended on in the latter. Methinks, the very Creation itself, and bountiful Provision therein made, for the Accommodation and Happiness of Man, might assure us, that (Man being made principally for another World) a *proportionate Care* will be taken of his more important and everlasting Concerns. Which presents me with a fair Opportunity, of exposing a Notion these Gentlemen hold, or a Method they have, of interpreting such plain Texts of Scripture, as are brought to prove God's general Care and Providence over his whole Creation; in *particular*, where *David* says, "The tender Mercies of the Lord are over all his Works:" This, if you believe them, relates only to this Life; so I think Mr. *Gill* says. But what then, Is no Inference thence to be made? If God be thus tender, to provide Temporals, how *much more* will he be kind to the Soul, and provide for *that!* 'Tis a natural and strong Way of arguing, and it was our Saviour's own Method of arguing, as the most Plain and Conclusive: "Wherefore if God so cloath the Grass of the Field, &c. How much more shall he cloath you, &c." *Mat.* vi. 30. The Argument rises in one Case, as much above the other, as *immortal Life* is preferable to the present *mortal State*; and suppose any of us should sympathise with a near Friend, under a *small Degree* of Pain and Affliction, would not the same Spirit of Friendship and Humanity have a *stronger Sympathy*, when Affliction becomes more intense and severe? To be tender and pitiful in the least and lowest Matters, and unregardful and cruel in important and everlasting Concerns, is, with regard to the *Divine Being*, a moral Impossibility; 'tis *beneath* human Nature and Prudence, and the Practice of a good Man; And

yet these Doctrines teach this horrible impiety concerning the great God himself.

To sum up this Argument: That Being who can make a sensible rational Creature, on *Purpose for Damnation*, instead of taking a reasonable Care of it, which, from its Make and Dependance, it has a Right to expect, as much as though a formal Promise were made, may, with altogether as much (*nay more*) Justice, break its Promises of eternal Life, *made* to another Creature of the same Kind; its Claim not being founded in Nature, but built on Promise. As the former would be a more cruel and un-justifiable Proceeding than the latter, he that is capable of doing the one, can have *no moral Perfections* in his Nature sufficient to secure the *Elect* against his doing the other: and on this *wild* and *boundless* Principle of *Sovereignty*, it is possible that, with regard to *Religion*, Things may be quite *reversed* hereafter; the *Elect*, as they are called, made *miserable*, and the *Non-elect*, *happy*. I think we may challenge the whole World, to shew on this mad Principle the contrary; and why, as well as any thing else, such an Economy may not be resolved into *Sovereign Pleasure*. If God to *Isaac* conveyed such errant Falshoods, by the Instrumentality of *Jacob's Mouth*, *Why not* make the same *deceitful Use* of the *Bible*, or even of his own immediate Word, in regard to the *Elect*? If God, as Mr. *Gill* (I think) observes, has two Wills, "One publick Will of Command, and another of Intention, which is private;" *Why*, with regard to the *Elect*, may he not promise one thing, and intend, *nay* resolve on another? One would think it impossible, for any understanding Man to judge thus of his Creator, that it is possible he should command one Thing under the *severest Penalties*, and at the *same Time* not only *will* and *intend*, but irresistibly and secretly work to accomplish just the contrary, and (what is amazing beyond Belief) after all punish severely the Creatures concerned, whom he actuates to bring his secret Purposes to pass: If there can be such a thing as arbitrary Power and tyrannical Government, in the very worst Sense of all, here it is. And here certainly is all the *Phrensy*, *Folly*, and *Tyranny*, which, I told you in the Beginning, the Government of such an arbitrary Being (as these Gentlemen represent the Deity to be) must ever be liable to.

It is evident, that as worthy Sentiments of God and of Religion, better the Mind, and improve the Understanding; so do weak and