

# BONDAGE OF THE WILL

by Martin Luther

---

*Luther's powerful 1525 treatise written in response to Erasmus, defending the doctrine of the complete bondage of the human will to sin and the absolute necessity of divine grace for salvation. Luther considered this work his most important theological writing.*

14 Chapters

## Table of Contents

0. Bondage of the Will
1. 01 - Introduction of Martin Luther
2. 02 - Sections 1-8: Erasmus' Preface, Scepticism, Knowledge of God
3. 03 - Sections 9-27: The Sovereignty of God
4. 04 - Sections 28-40: Exordium
5. 05 - Sections 41-58: Discussion, Part I-a
6. 06 - Sections 59-75: Discussion, Part I-b
7. 07 - Sections 76-90: Discussion, Part II-a
8. 08 - Sections 91-110: Discussion, Part II-b
9. 09 - Sections 111-125: Discussion, Part II-c
10. 10 - Sections 126-134: Discussion, Part II-d
11. 11 - Sections 135-145: Discussion, Part III-a
12. 12 - Sections 146-155: Discussion, Part III-b
13. 13 - Sections 156-168: Discussion, Part III-c

## Bondage of the Will

---

## 01 - Introduction of Martin Luther

---

Introduction to the *Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther, translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain. Introduction Martin Luther to the Venerable Dr. Erasmus of Rotterdam, wishing grace and peace in Christ.

That I have been so long answering your diatribe on free will, Venerable Erasmus, has happened contrary to the expectation of all, and contrary to my own custom also. For hitherto I have not only appeared to embrace willingly opportunities of this kind for writing, but even to seek them of my own accord. Some one may, perhaps, wonder at this new and unusual thing, this forbearance or fear in Luther, who could not be roused up by so many boasting taunts and letters of adversaries congratulating Erasmus on his victory, and singing to him the song of triumph.

What that Maccabee, that obstinate asserter, then, has at last found an antagonist a match for him, against whom he dares not open his mouth! But so far from accusing them, I myself openly concede that to you which I never did to anyone before, that you not only by far surpassed me in the powers of eloquence and ingenious, which we all concede to you as your desert, and the more so, as I am but a barbarian, and do all things barbarously, but that you have damped my spirit and impetus, and rendered me languid before the battle, and that by two means, first by art, because, that is, you conduct this discussion with a most specious and uniform modesty, by which you have met and prevented me from being incensed against you, and next, because on so great a subject you say nothing but what has been said before. Therefore you say less about, and attribute more unto free will, than the sophists have hitherto said and attributed, of which I shall speak more fully hereafter. So that it seems to me even superfluous to reply to these your arguments, which have been indeed often refuted by me, but trodden down and trampled underfoot by the incontrovertible book of Philip Melanchthon concerning theological questions, a book, in my judgment, worthy not only of being immortalized, but of being included in the ecclesiastical canon, in comparison of which your book is, in my estimation, so mean and vile, that I greatly feel for you for having defiled your most beautiful and ingenious language with such vile trash.

And I feel an indignation against the matter also that such unworthy stuff should be borne about in ornaments of eloquence so rare, which is as if rubbish or dung should be carried in vessels of gold and silver. And this you yourself seem to have felt, who were so unwilling to undertake this work of writing, because your conscience told you that you would of necessity have to try the point with all the powers of eloquence, and that after all you would not be able so to blind me by your coloring, but that I should, having torn off the deceptions of language, discover the real dregs beneath. For although I am rude in speech, yet by the grace of God I am not rude in understanding.

And with Paul I dare arrogate to myself understanding, and with confidence derogate it from you, although I willingly and deservedly arrogate eloquence ingenious to you, and derogate it from myself. Wherefore I thought thus. If there be any who have not drank more deeply into, and more firmly held my doctrines, which are supported by such weighty scriptures, than to be moved by these light and trivial arguments of Erasmus, though so highly ornamented, they are not worthy of

being healed by my answer.

Because for such men nothing could be spoken or written of enough, even though it should be in many thousands of volumes a thousand times repeated. For it is as if one should plough the seashore, and sow seed in the sand, or attempt to fill a cask full of holes with water. For as to those who have drunk into the teaching of the Spirit in my books, to them enough and abundance has been administered, and they at once contemn your writings.

But as to those who read without the Spirit, it is no wonder if they be driven to and fro like a reed with every wind. To such God would not have said enough, even if all his creatures should be converted into tongues. Therefore it would perhaps have been wisdom to have left these offended at your book, along with those who glory in you, and decree to you the triumph.

Hence it was not from a multitude of engagements, nor from the difficulty of the undertaking, nor from the greatness of your eloquence, nor from a fear of yourself, but from mere irksomeness, indignation, and contempt, or, so to speak, from my judgment of your diatribe, that my impetus to your answer was damped. Not to observe in the meantime that, being ever like yourself, you take the most diligent care to be on every occasion slippery and pliant of speech, and while you wish to appear to assert nothing, and yet at the same time to assert something more cautious than Ulysses, you seem to be steering your course between Scylla and Charybdis. To meet men of such sort, what, I would ask, can be brought forward or composed, unless anyone knew how to catch Proteus himself? But what I may be able to do in this matter, and what profit your art will be to you, I will, Christ cooperating with me, hereafter show.

This my reply to you, therefore, is not holy without cause. My brethren in Christ press me to it, setting before me the expectation of all, seeing that the authority of Erasmus is not to be despised, and the truth of the Christian doctrine is endangered in the hearts of many. And, indeed, I felt a persuasion in my own mind that my silence would not be altogether right, and that I was deceived by the prudence or malice of the flesh, and not sufficiently mindful of my office, in which I am a debtor both to the wise and to the unwise, and especially since I was called to it by the entreaties of so many brethren.

For although our cause is such that it requires more than the external teacher, and besides him that planteth and him that watereth outwardly has need of the Spirit of God to give the increase, and, as a living teacher, to teach us inwardly living things, all which I was led to consider, yet, since that Spirit is free, and bloweth not where we will, but where he willeth, it was needful to observe that rule of Paul, be instant in season and out of season, 2 Timothy 4, 2. For we know not at what hour the Lord cometh, be it therefore that those who have not yet felt the teaching of the Spirit in my writings have been overthrown by that diatribe. Perhaps their hour was not yet come. And who knows but that God may even condescend to visit you, my friend Erasmus, by me his poor weak vessel, and that I may, which from my heart I desire of the Father of mercies through Jesus Christ our Lord, come unto you by this book in a happy hour, and gain over a dearest brother.

For although you think and write wrong concerning free will, yet no small things are due unto you from me, and that you have rendered my own sentiments far more strongly confirmed, from my seeing the cause of free will handled by all the powers of such and so great talents, and, so far

from being bettered, left worse than it was before, which leaves an evident proof that free will is a downright lie, and that, like the woman in the gospel, the more it is taken in hand by physicians the worse it is made. Therefore the greater thanks will be rendered to you by me, if you by me gain more information, as I have gained by you more confirmation. But each is the gift of God, and not the work of our own endeavors.

Wherefore prayer must be made unto God, that he would open the mouth in me, and the heart in you, and in all, that he would be the teacher in the midst of us, who may in us speak and hear. But from you, my friend Erasmus, suffer me to obtain the grant of this request, that, as I in these matters bear with your ignorance, so you, in return, would bear with my want of eloquent utterance. God giveth not all things to each, nor can we each do all things.

Or, as Paul saith, there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12.4. It remains, therefore, that these gifts render a mutual service, that the one with his gift sustain the burden and what is lacking in the other. So shall we fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6.2.

## 02 - Sections 1-8: Erasmus' Preface, Scepticism, Knowledge of God

---

Sections 1 through 8 of *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther. Translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain.

Erasmus' Preface Reviewed. Section 1. First of all, I would just touch upon some of the heads of your preface, in which you somewhat disparage our cause and adorn your own. In the first place, I would notice your censuring in me, in all your former books, an obstinacy of assertion, and saying in this book that you are so far from delighting in assertions that you would rather at once go over to the sentiments of the skeptics if the inviolable authority of the holy scriptures and the decrees of the church would permit you, to which authorities you willingly submit yourself in all things, whether you follow what they prescribe or follow it not.

These are the principles that please you. I consider, as in courtesy bound, that these things are asserted by you from a benevolent mind, as being a lover of peace. But if anyone else had asserted them, I should perhaps have attacked him in all my accustomed manner.

But, however, I must not even allow you, though so very good in your intentions, to err in this opinion. For not to delight in assertions is not the character of the Christian mind. Nay, he must delight in assertions, or he is not a Christian.

But, that we may not be mistaken in terms, by assertion I mean a constant adhering, affirming, confessing, defending, and invincibly persevering. Nor do I believe the term signifies anything else, either among the Latins, or as it is used by us at this day. And, moreover, I speak concerning the asserting of those things which are delivered to us from above, in the holy scriptures.

Were it not so, we should want neither Erasmus, nor any other instructor, to teach us that in things doubtful, useless, or unnecessary, assertions, contentions, and strivings would be not only absurd, but impious. And Paul condemns such in more places than one. Nor do you, I believe, speak of these things, unless, as a ridiculous orator, you wish to take up one subject and go on with another, as the Roman emperor did with his turbot.

Or, with the madness of a wicked writer, you wish to contend that the article concerning free will is doubtful, or not necessary. Be skeptics and academics far from us Christians, but be there with us asserters, twofold more determined than the Stoics themselves. How often does the Apostle Paul require that assurance of faith, that is, that most certain and most firm assertion of conscience, calling it, Romans 10.10, confession, with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

And Christ also saith, Whosoever confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father, Matthew 10.32. Peter commands us to give a reason of the hope that is in us, 1 Peter 3.15. But why should I dwell upon this? Nothing is more known and more general among Christians than assertions. Take away assertions, and you take away Christianity. Nay, the Holy Spirit is given unto them from heaven, that he may glorify Christ and confess him even unto death, unless this be not to assert, to die for confession and assertion.

In a word, the Spirit so asserts that he comes upon the whole world and reproves them of sin, John 16.8, thus, as it were, provoking to battle. And Paul enjoins Timothy to reprove, and to be instant out of season, 2 Timothy 4.2. But how ludicrous to me would be that reprove, who should neither really believe that himself of which he reproveth, nor constantly assert it. Why, I would send him to Anticyra to be cursed.

But I am the greatest fool, who thus lose words and time upon that which is clearer than the sun. What Christian would bear that assertions could be contemned? This would be at once to deny all piety and religion together, or to assert that religion, piety, and every doctrine is nothing at all. Why, therefore, do you too say that you do not delight in assertions, and that you prefer such a mind to any other? But you would have it understood that you have said nothing here concerning confessing Christ and his doctrines.

I receive the admonition, and, in courtesy to you, I give up my right and custom, and refrain from judging of your heart, reserving that for another time, or for others. In the meantime, I admonish you to correct your tongue and your pen, and to refrain henceforth from using such expressions. For how upright and honest soever your heart may be, your words, which are the index of the heart, are not so.

For if you think the matter of free will is not necessary to be known, nor at all concerned with Christ, you speak honestly, but think wickedly. But if you think it is necessary, you speak wickedly, and think rightly. And if so, then there is no room for you to complain and exaggerate so much concerning useless assertions and contentions, for what have they to do with the nature of the cause? ERASMUS' SKEPTICISM.

Section 2. But what will you say to these your declarations, when, be it remembered, they are not confined to free will only, but apply to all doctrines in general throughout the world, that, if it were permitted you by the inviolable authority of the sacred writings and decrees of the church, you would go over to the sentiments of the skeptics? What an all-changeable proteus is there in these expressions, inviolable authority, and decrees of the church, as though you could have so very great a reverence for the scriptures and the church, when at the same time you signify that you wish you had the liberty of being a skeptic? What Christian would talk in this way? But if you say this in reference to useless and doubtful doctrines, what news is there in what you say? Who in such things would not wish for the liberty of the skeptical profession? Nay, what Christian is there who does not actually use this liberty freely, and condemn all those who are drawn away with and captivated by every opinion? Unless you consider all Christians to be such, as the term is generally understood, whose doctrines are useless, and for which they quarrel like fools, and contend by assertions. But if you speak of necessary things, what declaration more impious can any one make, than that he wishes for the liberty of asserting nothing in such matters? Whereas the Christian will rather say this, I am so averse to the sentiments of the skeptics, that wherever I am not hindered by the infirmity of the flesh, I will not only steadily adhere to the sacred writings everywhere, and in all parts of them, and assert them, but I wish also to be as certain as possible in things that are not necessary, and that lie without the scriptures, for what is more miserable than uncertainty? What shall we say to these things also, where you add, To which authorities I submit my opinion in all things, whether I follow what they enjoin, or follow it not? What say you, Erasmus? Is it not enough that you submit your opinion to the scriptures? Do you submit it to the

decrees of the church also? What can the church decree that is not decreed in the scriptures? If it can, where then remains the liberty and power of judging those who make the decrees? As Paul, 1 Corinthians 14, teaches, Let others judge. Are you not pleased that there should be any one to judge the decrees of the church, which nevertheless Paul enjoins? What new kind of religion and humility is this, that by our own example you would take away from us the power of judging the decrees of men, and give it unto men without judgment? Where does the scripture of God command us to do this? Moreover, what Christian would so commit the injunctions of the scripture and of the church to the winds, as to say, Whether I follow them or follow them not? You submit yourself, and yet care not at all whether you follow them or not.

But let that Christian be anathema, who is not certain in, and does not follow, that which is enjoined him. For how will he believe that which he does not follow? Do you here, then, mean to say that following is understanding a thing certainly, and not doubting of it at all, in a skeptical manner? If you do, what is there in any creature which any one can follow, if following be understanding, and seeing, and knowing perfectly? And if this be the case, then it is impossible that any one should, at the same time, follow some things, and not follow others. Whereas by following one certain thing, God, he follows all things.

That is, in him whom whoso followeth not, never followeth any part of his creature. In a word, these declarations of yours amount to this, that with you it matters not what is believed by any one, anywhere, if the peace of the world be but undisturbed, and if every one be but allowed, when his life, his reputation, or his interest is at stake, to do as he did who said, If they affirm, I affirm, if they deny, I deny, and to look upon the Christian doctrines as nothing better than the opinions of philosophers and men, and that it is the greatest of folly to quarrel about, contend for, and assert them, as nothing can arise therefrom but contention, and the disturbance of the public peace, that what is above us does not concern us, this, I say, is what your declarations amount to. Thus, to put an end to our fightings, you come in as an intermediate peacemaker, that you may cause each side to suspend arms, and persuade us to cease from drawing swords about things so absurd and useless.

What I should cut at here, I believe, my friend Erasmus, you know very well, but, as I said before, I will not openly express myself. In the meantime, I excuse your very good intention of heart, but do you go no further. Fear the Spirit of God, who searcheth the reins and the heart, and who is not deceived by artfully contrived expressions.

I have upon this occasion expressed myself thus, that henceforth you may cease to accuse our cause of pertinacity or obstinacy. For by so doing you only evince that you hug in your heart a Lucian, or some other of the swinish tribe of the Epicureans, who, because he does not believe there is a God himself, secretly laughs at all those who do believe and confess it. Allow us to be asserters, and to study and delight in assertions, and do you favour your sceptics and academics until Christ shall have called you also.

The Holy Spirit is not a sceptic, nor are what he has written on our hearts doubts or opinions, but assertions more certain and more firm than life itself and all human experience. Section 3. Now I come to the next head which is connected with this, where you make a distinction between the Christian doctrines, and pretend that some are necessary and some not necessary. You say that some are abstruse and some quite clear.

Thus you merely sport the sayings of others, or else exercise yourself as it were in a rhetorical figure, and you bring forward in support of this opinion that passage of Paul, Romans 11.33, O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and goodness of God, and also that of Isaiah 40.13, Who hath hopened the Spirit of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor? You could easily say these things, seeing that you either knew not that you were writing to Luther, but for the world at large, or did not think that you were writing against Luther, whom, however, I hope you allowed to have some acquaintance with and judgment in the sacred writings. But if you do not allow it, then behold, I will also twist things thus. This is the distinction which I make, that I also may act a little the rhetorician and logician.

God and the Scriptures of God are two things, no less so than God and the creature of God, that there are in God many hidden things which we know not, no one doubts, as he himself saith concerning the last day, of that day knoweth no man but the Father, Matthew 24.36, and Acts 1.7, It is not yours to know the times and seasons. And again, I know whom I have chosen, John 13.18. And Paul, the Lord knoweth them that are his, 2 Timothy 2.19, and the like. But that there are in the Scriptures some things abstruse, and that all things are not quite plain, is a report spread abroad by the impious sophists by whose mouth you speak here, Erasmus.

But they never have produced, nor ever can produce, one article whereby to prove this their madness. And it is with such scarecrows that Satan has frightened away men from reading the sacred writings, and has rendered the Holy Scripture contemptible, that he might cause his poisons of philosophy to prevail in the church. This, indeed, I confess, that there are many places in the Scriptures obscure and abstruse, not from the majesty of the thing, but from our ignorance of certain terms and grammatical particulars.

But which do not prevent a knowledge of all things in the Scriptures. For what thing of more importance can remain hidden in the Scriptures, now that the seals are broken, the stone rolled from the door of the sepulchre, and that greatest of all mysteries brought to light, Christ made man? That God is Trinity and Unity? That Christ suffered for us, and will reign to all eternity? Are not these things known and proclaimed even in our streets? Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what will you find remaining in them? All the things therefore contained in the Scriptures are made manifest, although some places from the words not being understood are yet obscure. But to know that all things in the Scriptures are set in the clearest light, and then, because a few words are obscure, to report that the things are obscure, is absurd and impious.

And if the words are obscure in one place, yet they are clear in another. But, however, the same thing which has been most openly declared to the whole world is both spoken of in the Scriptures in plain words, and also still lies hidden in obscure words. Now, therefore, it matters not if the thing be in the light, whether any certain representations of it be in obscurity or not, if, in the meanwhile, many other representations of the same thing be in the light.

For who would say that the public fountain is not in the light, because those who are in some dark narrow lane do not see it, when all those who are in the open marketplace can see it plainly? Section 4. What you adduce, therefore, about the darkness of the Corician cavern amounts to nothing. Matters are not so in the Scriptures. For those things which are of the greatest majesty and the most abstruse mysteries are no longer in the dark corner, but before the very doors may brought forth and manifested openly.

For Christ has opened our understanding to understand the Scriptures. Luke 24, 45. And the gospel is preached to every creature.

Mark 16, 15. Colossians 1, 23. Their sound is gone out into all the world.

Psalms 19, 4. And all things that are written are written for our instruction. Romans 15, 4. And again, all Scripture is inspired from above and is profitable for instruction. 2 Timothy 3, 16.

Therefore come forward, you and all the sophists together, and produce any one mystery which is still abstruse in the Scriptures. But if many things still remain abstruse to many, this does not arise from obscurity in the Scriptures, but from their own blindness or want of understanding, who do not go the way to see the all-perfect clearness of the truth. As Paul saith concerning the Jews.

2 Corinthians 3, 15. The veil still remains upon their heart. And again, if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, whose heart the God of this world hath blinded.

2 Corinthians 4, 3-4. With the same rashness, any one may cover his own eyes, or go from the light into the dark and hide himself, and then blame the day and the sun for being obscure. Let, therefore, wretched men cease to impute with blasphemous perverseness the darkness and obscurity of their own heart to the all-clear Scriptures of God.

You, therefore, when you adduce Paul, saying, His judgments are incomprehensible, seem to make the pronoun his, eius, refer to Scripture, Scriptura, whereas Paul does not say, The judgments of the Scripture are incomprehensible, but the judgments of God. So also Isaiah 40, 13 does not say, Who has known the mind of the Scripture? but, Who has known the mind of the Lord? although Paul asserts that the mind of the Lord is known to Christians. But it is in those things which are freely given unto us, as he saith also in the same place, 1 Corinthians 2, 10, and 16.

You see, therefore, how sleepily you have looked over these places of the Scripture, and you cite them just as aptly as you cite nearly all the passages in defense of free will. In like manner your examples which you subjoin, not without suspicion and bitterness, are nothing at all to the purpose. Such are those concerning the distinction of persons, the union of the divine and human natures, the unpardonable sin, the ambiguity attached to which you say has never been cleared up.

If you mean the questions of sophists that have been agitated upon those subjects, well. But what has the all-innocent Scripture done to you, that you impute the abuse of the most wicked of men to its purity? The Scripture simply confesses the Trinity of God, the humanity of Christ, and the unpardonable sin. There is nothing here of obscurity or ambiguity.

But how these things are, the Scripture does not say, nor is it necessary to be known. The sophists employ their dreams here. Attack and condemn them, and acquit the Scripture.

But if you mean the reality of the matter, I say again, attack not the Scriptures, but the Arians, and those to whom the Gospel is hid, that through the working of Satan they might not see the all-manifest testimonies concerning the Trinity of the Godhead and the humanity of Christ. But to be brief, the clearness of the Scripture is twofold, even as the obscurity is twofold also. The one is external, placed in the ministry of the Word, the other internal, placed in the understanding of the

heart.

If you speak of the internal clearness, no man sees one iota in the Scriptures, but he that hath the Spirit of God. All have a darkened heart, so that even if they know how to speak of and set forth all things in the Scripture, yet they cannot feel them, nor know them, nor do they believe that they are the creatures of God, nor anything else. According to that of Psalm 14.1, the fool hath said in his heart, God is nothing.

For the Spirit is required to understand the whole of the Scripture and every part of it. If you speak of the external clearness, nothing whatever is left obscure or ambiguous, but all things that are in the Scriptures are by the Word brought forth into the clearest light and proclaimed to the whole world. But this is still more intolerable, your enumerating this subject of free will among those things that are useless and not necessary, and drawing up for us instead of it a form of those things which you consider necessary unto Christian piety, such a form as certainly any Jew or any Gentile utterly ignorant of Christ might draw up.

For of Christ you make no mention in one iota, as though you thought that there may be Christian piety without Christ, if God be but worshipped with all the powers as being by nature most merciful. What shall I say here, Erasmus? To me you breathe out nothing but Lucian, and draw in the gorging surfeit of Epicurus. If you consider this subject not necessary to Christians, away, I pray you, out of the field.

I have nothing to do with you. I consider it necessary. If, as you say, it be irreligious, if it be curious, if it be superfluous, to know whether or not God foreknows anything by contingency, whether our own will does anything in those things which pertain unto eternal salvation, or is only passive under the work of grace, whether or not we do what we do of good or evil from necessity, or rather from being passive, what then, I ask, is religious? What is grave? What is useful to be known? All this, Erasmus, is to no purpose whatever.

And it is difficult to attribute this to your ignorance, because you are now old, have been conversant with Christians, and have long studied the sacred writings. Therefore you leave no room for my excusing you, or having a good thought concerning you. And yet the Papists pardon and put up with these enormities in you, and on this account, because you are writing against Luther.

Otherwise, if Luther were not in the case, they would tear you to pieces tooth and nail. Plato is a friend, Socrates is a friend, but truth is to be honored above all. For, granting that you have but little understanding in the Scriptures and in Christian piety, surely even an enemy to Christians ought to know what Christians consider useful and necessary, and what they do not.

Whereas you, a theologian, a teacher of Christians, and about to draw up for them a form of Christianity, not only in your skeptical manner doubt of what is necessary and useful to them, but go away into the directly opposite, and, contrary to your own principles, by an unheard of assertion declare it to be your judgment that those things are not necessary. Whereas, if they be not necessary, and certainly known, there can remain neither God, nor Christ, nor gospel, nor faith, nor anything else, even of Judaism, much less of Christianity. In the name of the immortal God, Erasmus, what an occasion, yea, what a field do you open for acting and speaking against you! What could you write well or correctly concerning free will, who confess by these your declarations

so great an ignorance of the Scripture and of godliness? But I draw in my sails, nor will I here deal with you in my words, for that perhaps I shall do hereafter, but in your own.

Section 6. The form of Christianity set forth by you, among other things, has this, that we should strive with all our powers, have recourse to the remedy of repentance, and in all ways try to gain the mercy of God, without which neither human will nor endeavor is effectual. Also, that no one should despair of pardon from a God by nature most merciful. These statements of yours are without Christ, without the Spirit, and more cold than ice, so that the beauty of your eloquence is really deformed by them.

Perhaps the fear of the popes and those tyrants extorted them from their miserable vassal, lest you should appear to them a perfect atheist. But what they assert is this, that there is ability in us, that there is a striving with all our powers, that there is mercy in God, that there are ways of gaining that mercy, that there is a God by nature just and most merciful, and so forth. But if a man does not know what these powers are, what they can do, or in what they are to be passive, what their efficacy or what their inefficacy is, what can such an one do? What will you set him about doing? It is irreligious, curious, and superfluous, you say, to wish to know whether our own will does anything in those things which pertain unto eternal salvation, or whether it is wholly passive under the work of grace.

But here you say the contrary, that it is Christian piety to strive with all the powers, and that without the mercy of God the will is ineffective. Here you plainly assert that the will does something in those things which pertain unto eternal salvation, when you speak of it as striving, and again you assert that it is passive when you say that without the mercy of God it is ineffective, though at the same time you do not define how far that doing and being passive is to be understood, thus designedly keeping us in ignorance how far the mercy of God extends, and how far our own will extends. What our own will is to do in that which you enjoin, and what the mercy of God is to do? Thus that prudence of yours carries you along, by which you are resolved to hold with neither side, and to escape safely through the Scylla and Charybdis, in order that when you come into the open sea and find yourself overwhelmed and confounded by the waves, you may have it in your power to assert all that you now deny, and deny all that you now assert.

The Necessity of Knowing God and His Power. Section 7. But I will set your theology before your eyes by a few similitudes. What if anyone intending to compose a poem or an oration should never think about nor inquire into his abilities, what he could do and what he could not do, nor what the subject undertaken required, and should utterly disregard that precept of Horus, what the shoulders can sustain and what they must sink under, but should precipitously dash upon the undertaking and think thus, I must strive to get the work done, to inquire whether the learning I have, the eloquence I have, the force of genius I have be equal to it, is curious and superfluous? Or if anyone desiring to have a plentiful crop from his land should not be so curious as to take the superfluous care of examining the nature of the soil, as Virgil curiously and in vain teaches in his Georgics, but should rush on at once, thinking of nothing but the work, and plow the seashore, and cast in the seed wherever the soil was turned up, whether sand or mud? Or if anyone about to make war, and desiring a glorious victory, or intending to render any other service to the state, should not be so curious as to deliberate upon what it was in his power to do, whether the treasury could furnish money, whether the soldiers were fit, whether any opportunity offered, and should

pay no regard whatever to that of the historian, before you act there must be deliberation, and when you have deliberated, speedy execution.

But should rush forward with his eyes blinded and his ears stopped, only exclaiming, War! War! and should be determined on the undertaking. What, I ask you, Erasmus, would you think of such poets, such husbandmen, such generals, and such heads of affairs? I will add also that of the gospel. If anyone going to build a tower sits not down first and counts the cost, whether he has enough to finish it, what does Christ say of such an one? Luke 14, 28-32.

Thus you also enjoin us works only, but you forbid us to examine, weigh, and know first our ability, what we can do and what we cannot do, as being curious, superfluous, and irreligious. Thus, while with your overcautious prudence you pretend to detest temerity, and make a show of sobriety, you go so far that you even teach the greatest of all temerity. For, although the sophists are rash and mad in reality while they pursue their curious inquiries, yet their sin is less enormous than yours.

For you even teach and enjoin men to be mad, and to rush on with temerity. And to make your madness still greater, you persuade us that this temerity is the most exalted in Christian piety, sobriety, religious gravity, and even salvation. And you assert that if we exercise it not we are irreligious, curious, and vain, although you are so great an enemy to assertions.

Thus, in steering clear of Charybdis, you have with excellent grace escaped Scylla also. But into this state you are driven by your confidence in your own talents. You believe that you can by your eloquence so impose upon the understandings of all that no one shall discover the design which you secretly hug in your heart, and what you aim at in all those your pliant writings.

But God is not mocked, Galatians 6, 7, upon whom it is not safe to run. Moreover, had you enjoined us this temerity in composing poems, in preparing for fruits, in conducting wars or other undertakings, or in building houses, although it would have been intolerable, especially in so great a man, yet you might have been deserving of some pardon, at least from Christians, for they pay no regard to these temporal things. But when you enjoin Christians themselves to become rash workers, and charge them not to be curious about what they can do and what they cannot do in obtaining eternal salvation, this evidently and in reality is the sin unpardonable.

For while they know not what or how much they can do, they will not know what to do. And if they know not what to do, they cannot repent when they do wrong. And impenitence is the unpardonable sin.

And to this does that moderate and skeptical theology of yours lead us. Therefore it is not irreligious, curious, or superfluous, but essentially wholesome and necessary for a Christian to know whether or not the will does anything in those things which pertain unto salvation. Nay, let me tell you, this is the very hinge upon which our discussion turns.

It is the very heart of our subject. For our object is this, to inquire what free will can do, in what it is passive, and how it stands with reference to the grace of God. If we know nothing of these things, we shall know nothing whatever of Christian matters, and shall be far behind all people upon earth.

He that does not feel this, let him confess that he is no Christian. And he that despises and laughs at it, let him know that he is the Christian's greatest enemy. For if I know not how much I can do myself, how far my ability extends, and what I can do Godwards, I shall be equally uncertain and

ignorant how much God is to do, how far his ability is to extend, and what he is to do towards me.

Whereas it is God that worketh all in all. 1 Corinthians 12 6. But if I know not the distinction between our working and the power of God, I know not God himself. And if I know not God, I cannot worship him, praise him, give him thanks, nor serve him.

For I shall not know how much I ought to ascribe unto myself, and how much unto God. It is necessary, therefore, to hold the most certain distinction between the power of God and our power, the working of God and our working, if we would live in his sphere. Hence, you see, this point forms another part of the whole sum of Christianity, on which depends and in which is at stake the knowledge of ourselves and the knowledge and glory of God.

Wherefore, friend Erasmus, your calling the knowledge of this point irreligious, curious, and vain, is not to be born in you. We owe much to you, but we owe all to the fear of God. Nay, you yourself see that all our good is to be ascribed unto God, and you assert that in your form of Christianity.

And in asserting this, you certainly at the same time assert also that the mercy of God alone does all things, and that our own will does nothing, but is rather acted upon. And so it must be, otherwise the whole is not ascribed unto God. And yet, immediately afterwards you say that to assert these things and to know them is irreligious, impious, and vain.

But at this rate, a mind which is unstable in itself, and unsettled and inexperienced in the things of godliness, cannot but talk. Section 8. Another part of the sum of Christianity is to know whether God foreknows anything by contingency, or whether we do all things from necessity. This part also you make to be irreligious, curious, and vain, as all the wicked do.

The devils and the detestable and execrable. And you show your wisdom in keeping yourself clear from such questions wherever you can do it. But, however, you are but a very poor rhetorician and theologian, if you pretend to speak of free will without these essential parts of it.

I will therefore act as a whetstone, and though no rhetorician myself will tell a famed rhetorician what he ought to do. If, then, Quintilian, purposing to write on oratory, should say, in my judgment, all that superfluous nonsense about invention, arrangement, elocution, memory, pronunciation, need not be mentioned. It is enough to know that oratory is the art of speaking well.

Would you not laugh at such a writer? But you act exactly like this. For, pretending to write on free will, you first throw aside and cast away the grand substance and all the parts of the subject on which you undertake to write. Whereas it is impossible that you should know what free will is, unless you know what the human will does and what God does or foreknows.

Do not your rhetoricians teach that he who undertakes to speak upon any subject ought first to show whether the thing exists, and then what it is, what its parts are, what is contrary to it, connected with it, and like unto it, and so forth? But you rob that miserable subject in itself, free will, of all these things, and define no one question concerning it except this first, namely, whether it exists, and even this with such arguments as we shall presently see. And so worthless a book on free will I never saw, excepting the eloquence of the language. The sophists in reality, at least, argue upon this point better than you, though those of them who have attempted the subject of free will are no rhetoricians, for they define all the questions connected with it, whether it exists, what it does, and how it stands with reference to, and so forth, although they do not affect what

they attempt.

In this book, therefore, I will push you and the sophists together until you shall define to me the power of free will, and what it can do, and I hope I shall so push you, Christ willing, as to make you heartedly repent that you ever published your diatribe.

## 03 - Sections 9-27: The Sovereignty of God

---

Sections 9 through 27 of the *Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther, translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain. The Sovereignty of God, Section 9. This, therefore, is also essentially necessary and wholesome for Christians to know, that God foreknows nothing by contingency, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His immutable, eternal, and infallible will.

By this thunderbolt, free will is thrown prostrate, and utterly dashed to pieces. Those, therefore, who would assert free will, must either deny this thunderbolt, or pretend not to see it, or push it from them. But, however, before I establish this point by any arguments of my own, and by the authority of Scripture, I will first set it forth in your words.

Are you not, then, the person, friend Erasmus, who just now asserted, that God is by nature just, and by nature most merciful? If this be true, does it not follow that He is immutably just and merciful? That, as His nature is not changed to all eternity, so neither His justice nor His mercy. And what is said concerning His justice and His mercy, must be said also concerning His knowledge, His wisdom, His goodness, His will, and His other attributes. If, therefore, these things are asserted religiously, piously, and wholesomely concerning God, as you say yourself, what has come to you, that, contrary to your own self, you now assert, that it is irreligious, curious, and vain to say that God foreknows of necessity? You openly declare that the immutable will of God is to be known, but you forbid the knowledge of His immutable prescience.

Do you believe that He foreknows against His will? Or that He wills in ignorance? If, then, He foreknows willing, His will is eternal and immovable, because His nature is so. And, if He wills foreknowing, His knowledge is eternal and immovable, because His nature is so. From which it follows unalterably, that all things which we do, although they may appear to us to be done mutably and contingently, and even may be done thus contingently by us, are yet in reality done necessarily and immutably with respect to the will of God.

For the will of God is effective and cannot be hindered, because the very power of God is natural to Him, and His wisdom is such that He cannot be deceived. And as His will cannot be hindered, the work itself cannot be hindered from being done in the place, at the time, in the measure, and by whom He foresees and wills. If the will of God were such that, when the work was done, the work remained, but the will ceased, as is the case with the will of men, which, when the house is built which they wished to build, ceases to will, as though it ended by death, then, indeed, it might be said that things are done by contingency and mutability.

But here the case is the contrary. The work ceases, and the will remains. So far is it from possibility that the doing of the work or its remaining can be said to be from contingency or mutability.

But, that we may not be deceived in terms, being done by contingency does not, in the Latin language, signify that the work itself which is done is contingent, but that it is done according to a

contingent and mutable will, such a will as is not to be found in God. Moreover, a work cannot be called contingent unless it be done by us unawares, by contingency, and, as it were, by chance, that is, by our will or hand catching at it, as presented by chance, we thinking nothing of it, nor willing anything about it before. Section 10.

I could wish, indeed, that we were furnished with some better term for this discussion than this commonly used term necessity, which cannot rightly be used either with reference to the human will or the divine. It is of a signification too harsh and ill-suited for this subject, forcing upon the mind an idea of compulsion, and that which is altogether contrary to will, whereas the subject which we are discussing does not require such an idea, for will, whether divine or human, does what it does, be it good or evil, not by any compulsion, but by mere willingness or desire, as it were, totally free. The will of God, nevertheless, which rules over our mutable will, is immutable and infallible, as Bocius sings, Immovable thyself, thou movement givest to all, and our own will, especially our corrupt will, cannot of itself do good.

Therefore, where the term fails to express the idea required, the understanding of the reader must make up the deficiency, knowing what is wished to be expressed, the immutable will of God, and the impotency of our own depraved will, or, as some have expressed it, the necessity of immutability, though neither is that sufficiently grammatical or sufficiently theological. Upon this point the sophists have now labored hard for many years, and being at last conquered, have been compelled to retreat. All things take place from the necessity of the consequence, say they, but not from the necessity of the thing consequent.

What nothingness this amounts to, I will not take the trouble to show. By the necessity of the consequence, to give a general idea of it, they mean this. If God wills anything, that same thing must, of necessity, be done, but it is not necessary that the thing done should be necessary, for God alone is necessary.

All other things cannot be so, if it is God that wills. Therefore, say they, the action of God is necessary where He wills, but the act itself is not necessary. That is, they mean, it has not essential necessity.

But what do they affect by this plain upon words? Only this, that the act itself is not necessary, that is, it has not essential necessity. This is no more than saying the act is not God Himself. This nevertheless remains certain, that if the action of God is necessary, or if there is a necessity of the consequence, everything takes place of necessity, how much soever the act be not necessary, that is, be not God Himself, or have not essential necessity.

For if I be not made of necessity, it is of little moment with me whether my existence in being be mutable or not, if nevertheless I, that contingent and mutable being, who am not the necessary God, am made. Wherefore their ridiculous play upon words, that all things take place from the necessity of the consequence, but not from the necessity of the thing consequent, amounts to nothing more than this, all things take place of necessity, but all the things that do take place are not God Himself. But what need was there to tell us this? As though there were any fear of our asserting that the things done were God Himself, or possessed divine or necessary nature.

This asserted truth, therefore, stands and remains invincible, that all things take place according to the immutable will of God, which they call the necessity of the consequence. Nor is there here any

obscurity or ambiguity. In Isaiah he saith, My counsel shall stand, and my will shall be done.

Isaiah 46.10. And what schoolboy does not understand the meaning of these expressions, counsel, will, shall be done, shall stand? Section 11. But why should these things be abstruse to us Christians, so that it should be considered irreligious, curious, and vain to discuss and know them when heathen poets and the very commonalty have them in their mouths in the most frequent use? How often does Virgil alone make mention of fate? All things stand fixed by law immutable. Again, fixed is the day of every man, again if the fates summon you, and again if thou shalt break the binding chain of fate.

All this poet aims at is to show that in the destruction of Troy, and in raising the Roman empire, fate did more than all the devoted efforts of men. In a word, he makes even their immortal gods subject to fate. To this even Jupiter and Juno must of necessity yield.

Hence they made the three *parci* immutable, implacable, and irrevocable in degree. Those men of wisdom knew that which the event itself with experience proves, that no man's own counsels ever succeeded, but that the event happened to all contrary to what they thought. Virgil's Hector says, Could Troy have stood by human arm, it should have stood by mine.

Hence that common saying was on everyone's tongue, God's will be done. Again, if God will, we will do it. Again, such was the will of God, such was the will of those above, such was your will, says Virgil.

Once we may see that the knowledge of predestination and of the prescience of God was no less left in the world than the notion of the divinity itself. And those who wished to appear wise went in their disputation so far that their hearts being darkened they became fools, Romans 1, 21-22, and denied or pretended not to know those things which their poets and the commonalty and even their own consciences held to be universally known, most certain and most true. Section 12.

I observe further not only how true these things are concerning which I shall speak more at large hereafter out of the scriptures, but also how religious, pious, and necessary it is to know them. For if these things be not known, there can be neither faith nor any worship of God, nay, not to know them is to be in reality ignorant of God, with which ignorance, salvation, it is well known, cannot consist. For if you doubt or disdain to know that God foreknows and wills all things, not contingently, but necessarily and immutably, how can you believe confidently, trust to, and depend upon His promises? For when He promises, it is necessary that you should be certain that He knows, is able, and willing to perform what He promises, otherwise you will neither hold Him true nor faithful, which is unbelief, the greatest of wickedness, and the denying of the Most High God.

And how can you be certain and secure unless you are persuaded that He knows and wills certainly, infallibly, immutably, and necessarily, and will perform what He promises? Nor ought we to be certain only that God wills necessarily and immutably and will perform, but also to glory in the same, as Paul, Romans 3, 4, let God be true, but every man a liar. And again, for the word of God is not without effect, Romans 6, 9. And in another place, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His, 2 Timothy 2, 19. And which God that cannot lie promised before the world began, Titus 1, 2. And he that cometh must believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that hope in Him, Hebrews 11, 6. If therefore we are taught, and if we believe, that we ought not to know the necessary prescience of God and the necessity of the

things that are to take place, Christian faith is utterly destroyed, and the promises of God and the whole Gospel entirely fall to the ground.

For the greatest and only consolation of Christians in their adversities is the knowing that God lies not, but does all things immutably, and that His will cannot be resisted, changed, or hindered. Section 13. Do you now then only observe, friend Erasmus, to what that most moderate and most peace-loving theology of yours would lead us? You call us off, and forbid our endeavoring to know the prescience of God, and the necessity that lies on men and things, and counsel us to leave such things, and to avoid and disregard them.

And in so doing, you at the same time teach us your rash sentiments, that we should seek after an ignorance of God, which comes upon us of its own accord, and is engendered in us. Disregard faith, leave the promises of God, and account the consolations of the Spirit and the assurances of conscience nothing at all. Such counsel scarcely any Epicure himself would give.

Moreover, not content with this, you call him who should desire to know such things irreligious, curious, and vain, but him who should disregard them, religious, pious, and sober. What else do these words imply than that Christians are irreligious, curious, and vain, and that Christianity is a thing of naught, vain, foolish, and plainly impious? Hear again, therefore, while you wish by all means to deter us from temerity, running, as fools always do, directly into the contrary, you teach nothing but the greatest temerity, impiety, and perdition. Do you not see, then, that in this part your book is so impious, blasphemous, and sacrilegious, that its like is not anywhere to be found? I do not, as I have observed before, speak of your heart, nor can I think that you are so lost, that from your heart you wish these things to be taught and practiced.

But I would show you what enormities that man must be compelled unknowingly to broach, who undertakes to support a bad cause, and, moreover, what it is to run against divine things and truths, when, in mere compliance with others, and against our own conscience, we assume a strange character, and act upon a strange stage. It is neither a game, nor a jest, to undertake to teach the sacred truths in godliness. For it is very easy here to meet with that fall which James speaks of, he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all.

James 2.10. For when we begin to be in the least degree disposed to trifle, and not to hold the sacred truths in due reverence, we are soon involved in impieties, and overwhelmed with blasphemies, as it has happened to you here, Erasmus. May the Lord pardon and have mercy upon you. That the sophists have given birth to such numbers of reasoning questions upon these subjects, and have intermingled with them many unprofitable things, many of which you mention, I know and confess, as well as you.

And I have invaded against them much more than you have. But you act with imprudence and rashness when you liken the purity of the sacred truths unto the profane and foolish questions of the impious, and mingle and confound it with them. They have deviled the gold with dung, and changed the good colour.

Lamentations 4.1. As Jeremiah saith. But the gold is not to be compared unto, and cast away with the dung, as you do it. The gold must be wrested from them, and the pure scriptures separated from their dregs and filth.

Which it has ever been my aim to do, that the divine truths may be looked upon in one light, and the trifles of these men in another. But it ought not to be considered of any service to us that nothing has been affected by these questions, but they are causing us to favour them less with the whole current of our approbation, if, nevertheless, we still desire to be wiser than we ought. The question with us is not how much the sophists have effected by their reasonings, but how we may become good men and Christians.

Nor ought you to impute it to the Christian doctrine that the impious do evil. That is nothing to the purpose. You may speak of that somewhere else, and spare your paper here.

Section 14. Under your third head, you attempt to make us some of those very modest and quiet Epicureans, with a different kind of advice indeed, but no better than that with which the two aforementioned particulars are brought forward. Some things, you say, are of that nature that, although they are true in themselves, and might be known, yet it would not be prudent to prostitute them to the ears of every one.

Here again, according to your custom, you mingle and confound everything, to bring the sacred things down to a level with the profane, without making any distinction whatever, again falling into the contempt of and doing an injury to God. As I have said before, those things which are either found in the sacred writings, or may be proved by them, are not only plain, but wholesome, and therefore may be, nay ought to be, spread abroad, learnt, and known. So that your saying that they ought not to be prostituted to the ears of every one is false, if, that is, you speak of those things which are in the Scripture.

But if you speak of any other things, they are nothing to me, and nothing to the purpose. You lose time and paper in saying anything about them. Moreover, you know that I agree not with the Sophists in anything.

You may therefore spare me, and not bring me in at all as connected with their abuse of the truth. You had in this book of yours to speak against me. I know where the Sophists are wrong, nor do I want you for my instructor, and they have been sufficiently invaded against by me.

This therefore I wish to be observed once for all, whenever you shall bring me in with the Sophists, and disparage my side of the subject by their madness. For you do me an injury, and that you know very well. Now let us see your reasons for giving this advice.

You think that, although it may be true that God from His nature is in a beetle's hole, or even in a sink, which you have too much holy reverence to say yourself, and blame the Sophists for talking in such a way, no less than in heaven, yet it would be unreasonable to discuss such a subject before the multitude. First of all, let them talk thus who can talk thus. We do not here argue concerning what are facts in men, but concerning justice and law.

Not that we may live, but that we may live as we ought. Who among us lives and acts rightly? But justice and the doctrine of law are not therefore condemned, but rather they condemn us. You fetch from afar these irrelevant things, and scrape together many such from all quarters, because you cannot get over this one point, prescience of God.

And since you cannot overthrow it in any way, you want in the meantime to tire out the reader with a multiplicity of empty observation. But of this no more. Let us return to the point.

What then is your intention in observing that there are some things which ought not to be spoken of openly? Do you mean to enumerate the subject of free will among those things? If you do, the whole that I have just said concerning the necessity of knowing what free will is will turn round upon you. Moreover, if so, why do you not keep your own principles, and have nothing to do with your diatribe? But if you do well in discussing free will, why do you speak against such discussion? And if it is a bad subject, why do you make it worse? But if you do not enumerate it among those things, then you leave your subject point, and, like an orator of words only, talk about those irrelevant things that have nothing to do with the subject. Nor are you right in the use of this example, nor in condemning the discussion of this subject before the multitude as useless, that God is in a beetle's hole and even in a sink.

For your thoughts concerning God are too human. I confess, indeed, that there are certain fantastical preachers who, not from any religion or fear of God, but from a desire of vain glory, or from a thirst after some novelty, or from impatience of silence, prate and trifle in the lightest manner. But such please neither God nor men, although they assert that God is in the heaven of heavens.

But when there are grave and pious preachers who teach in modest, pure, and sound words, they without any danger, nay, unto much profit, speak on such a subject before the multitude. Is it not the duty of us all to teach that the Son of God was in the womb of the Virgin, and proceeded forth from her belly? And in what does the human belly differ from any other unclean place? Who, moreover, may not describe it in filthy and shameless terms? But such persons we justly condemn, because there are numberless pure words in which we speak of that necessary subject, even with decency and grace. The body also of Christ himself was human like ours.

Than which body? What is more filthy? But shall we therefore not say what Paul saith, that God dwelt in it bodily? Colossians 2.9. What is more unclean than death? What more horrible than hell? Yet the prophet glorieth that God was with him in death, and left him not in hell. Psalm 16.10. Psalm 139.8. The pious mind, therefore, is not shocked at hearing that God was in death and in hell, each of which is more horrible and more loathsome than either a hole or a sink. Nay, since the Scripture testifies that God is everywhere, and fills all things, such a mind not only says that he is in those places, but will of necessity learn and know that he is there.

Unless we are to suppose that if at any time we should be taken and cast into a prison or a sink, which has happened to many saints, I could not dare call upon God, or believe that he was present with me, until I should come into some ornamented church. If you teach us that we are thus detriful concerning God, and if you are thus offended at the places of his essential presence, by and by you will not even allow that he dwells with us in heaven, whereas the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. 1 Kings 8.27. Or, they are not worthy.

But as I said before, you, according to your custom, thus maliciously point your sting at our cause, that you may disparage and render it hateful, because you find it stands against you insuperable and invincible. Section 17. In the example concerning confession and satisfaction, it is wonderful to observe with what dexterous prudence you proceed.

Throughout the whole, according to your custom, you move along on the tiptoe of caution, lest you should seem neither plainly to condemn my sentiments, nor to oppose the tyranny of the popes, a

path which you found to be by no means safe. Therefore, throwing off in this matter both God and conscience, for what are these things to Erasmus? What has he to do with them? What profit are they to him? You rush upon the external bug bear and attack the commonalty, that they from their depravity abuse the preaching of a free confession and of satisfaction to an occasion of the flesh. But nevertheless, you say, by the necessity of confessing, they are in a measure restrained.

O memorable and excellent speech! Is this teaching theology, to bind souls by laws, and, as Ezekiel saith, 13, 18, to hunt them to death which are not bound by God? Why, by this speech you bring upon us the universal tyranny of the laws of the popes as useful and wholesome, because that by them also the depravity of the commonality is restrained. But I will not inveigh against this place as it deserves. I will discant upon it thus briefly.

A good theologian teaches that the commonality are to be restrained by the external power of the sword, where they do evil, as Paul teaches, Romans 13, 1-4. But their consciences are not to be fettered by false laws, that they might be tormented with sins where God wills there should be no sins at all. For consciences are bound by the law of God only.

So that that intermediate tyranny of popes, which falsely terrifies and murders the souls within, and vainly wearies the bodies without, is to be taken entirely out of the way. Because, although it binds to confession and other things outwardly, yet the mind is not by these things restrained, but exasperated the more into the hatred both of God and men. And in vain does it butcher the body by external things, making nothing but hypocrites.

So that tyrants with laws of this kind are nothing else but ravening wolves, robbers, and plunderers of souls. And yet you, an excellent counselor of souls, recommend these to us again. That is, you are an advocate for these most barbarous soul murderers, who fill the world with hypocrites, and with such as blaspheme God and hate him in their hearts, in order that they may restrain them a little from outward sin, as though there were no other way of restraining, which makes no hypocrites, and is wrought without any destroying of consciences.

Section 18. Here you produce similitudes, in which you aim at appearing to abound, and to use very appropriately. That is, that there are diseases which may be born with less evil than they can be cured, as the leprosy, and so forth.

You add, moreover, the example of Paul, who makes a distinction between those things that are lawful, and those things that are not expedient. It is lawful, you say, to speak the truth, but before every one, at all times, and in every way, it is not expedient. How copious an orator! And yet you understand nothing of what you are saying.

In a word, you treat this discussion as though it were some matter between you and me only, about the recovering of some money that was at stake, or some other trivial thing, the loss of which, as being of much less consideration than the general peace of the community, ought not so to concern any one, but that he may yield, act, and suffer upon the occasion in any way that may prevent the necessity of the world being thrown into a tumult. Wherein you plainly evince that this peace and tranquillity of the flesh are with you a matter of far greater consideration than faith, than conscience, than salvation, than the word of God, than the glory of Christ, than God himself. Wherefore let me tell you this, and I entreat you to let it sink deep into your mind.

I am, in this discussion, seeking an object solemn and essential, nay, such and so great, that it ought to be maintained and defended through death itself, and that, although the whole world should not only be thrown into tumult and set in arms thereby, but even if it should be hurled into chaos and reduced to nothing. If you cannot receive this, or if you are not affected by it, do you mind your own business, and allow us to receive it, and to be affected by it, to whom it is given of God. For by the grace of God, I am not so great a fool or madman as to have desired to sustain and defend this cause so long, with so much fortitude and so much firmness, which you call obstinacy, in the face of so many dangers of my life, so much hatred, so many traps laid for me, in word, in the face of the fury of men and devils.

I have not done this for money, for that I neither have nor desire, nor for vainglory, for that, if I wished, I could not obtain in a world so enraged against me, nor for the life for my body, for that cannot be made sure of for an hour. Do you think, then, that you only have a heart that is moved by these tumults? Yet I am not made of stone, nor was I born from the Marpigian rocks, but since it cannot be otherwise, I choose rather to be battered in temporal tumult, happy in the grace of God, for God's words' sake, which is to be maintained with a mind incorrupt and invincible, than to be ground to powder in external tumult, under the wrath of God and torments intolerable. May Christ grant what I desire and hope, that your heart may not be such, but certainly your words imply, that with Epicurus you consider the word of God and a future life to be mere fables, for in your instructions you would have us for the sake of the popes, the heads, and the peace of the community, to put off upon an occasion and depart from the all-certain word of God, whereas if we put off that, we put off God, faith, salvation, and all Christianity together.

How far different from this is the instruction of Christ, that we should rather despise the whole world. But you say these things, because you either do not read or do not observe, that such is most constantly the case with the word of God, that because of it the world is thrown into tumult, and that Christ openly declares, I came not, says he, to send peace but a sword, Matthew 10, 34, and in Luke, I came to send fire upon the earth, Luke 12, 49, and Paul, 2 Corinthians 6, 5, in tumults and so forth, and the prophet in the second psalm abundantly testifies the same, declaring that the nations are in tumult, the people roaring, the kings rising up, and the princes conspiring against the Lord and against his Christ, as though he had said, multitude, height, wealth, power, wisdom, righteousness, and whatever is great in the world sets itself against the word of God. Look into the acts of the apostles and see what happened in the world on account of the word of Paul only, to say nothing of the other apostles.

How he alone throws both the Gentiles and Jews into commotion, or as the enemies themselves express it, turn the world upside down, Acts 17, 6. Under Elijah the kingdom of Israel was thrown into commotion, as King Ahab complains, 1 Kings 18, 17. What tumult was there under the other prophets, while they are all either killed at once or stoned to death, while Israel is taken captive into Assyria, and Judah also to Babylon? Was all this peace? The world and its God, 2 Corinthians 4, 4, cannot and will not bear the word of the true God, and the true God cannot and will not keep silence. While therefore these two gods are at war with each other, what can there be else in the whole world but tumult? Therefore to wish to silence these tumults is nothing else than to wish to hinder the word of God and to take it out of the way.

For the word of God, wherever it comes, comes to change and to renew the world. And even heathen writers testify that changes of things cannot take place without commotion and tumult, nor even without blood. It therefore belongs to Christians to expect and endure these things with a staid mind, as Christ says, When ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, be not dismayed, for these things must first come to pass, but the end is not yet.

Matthew 24, 6. And as to myself, if I did not see these tumults, I should say the word of God was not in the world. But now when I do see them, I rejoice from my heart and fear them not, being surely persuaded that the kingdom of the Pope, with all his followers, will fall to the ground. For it is especially against this that the word of God, which now runs, is directed.

I see indeed, my friend Erasmus, that you complain in many books of these tumults, and of the loss of peace and concord, and you attempt many means whereby to afford a remedy, and, as I am inclined to believe, with a good intention. But this gouty foot laughs at your doctoring hands. For here in truth, as you say, you sail against the tide.

Nay, you put out fire with straw. Cease from complaining, cease from doctoring. This tumult proceeds and is carried on from above, and will not cease until it shall make all the adversaries of the word as the dirt of the streets.

Though I am sorry that I find it necessary to teach you, so great a theologian, these things like a disciple, when you ought to be a teacher of others. Your excellent sentiment, then, that some diseases may be born with less evil than they can be cured, applies here, which sentiment you do not appositely use. Rather, call these tumults, commotions, perturbations, seditions, discords, wars, and all other things of the same kind with which the world is shaken and tossed to and fro on account of the word of God, the diseases.

These things, I say, as they are temporal, are born with less evil than inveterate and evil habits, by which all souls must be destroyed if they be not changed by the word of God, which being taken away, eternal good, God, Christ, and the Spirit, must be taken with it. But how much better it is to lose the whole world than to lose God, the creator of the world, who can create innumerable worlds again, and is better than infinite worlds. For what are temporal things when compared with eternal? This leprosy of temporal things, therefore, is rather to be born, than that every soul should be destroyed and eternally damned, and the world kept in peace and preserved from these tumults by their blood and perdition, whereas one soul cannot be redeemed with the price of the whole world.

You certainly have command of elegant and excellent similitudes and sentiments. But when you are engaged in sacred discussions, you apply them childishly, nay pervertedly, for you crawl upon the ground and enter in thought into nothing above what is human, whereas those things which God works are neither puerile, civil, nor human, but divine, and they exceed human capacity. Thus you do not see that these tumults and divisions increase throughout the world according to the counsel and by the operation of God, and therefore you fear lest heaven should tumble about our ears.

But I, by the grace of God, see these things clearly, because I see other tumults greater than these that will arise in the age to come, in comparison of which these appear but as the whispering of a breath of air, or the murmuring of a gentle brook. Section 20. But the doctrine concerning the

liberty of confession and satisfaction, you either deny or know not that there is a word of God.

And here arises another inquiry. But we know and are persuaded that there is a word of God in which the Christian liberty is asserted, that we might not suffer ourselves to be ensnared into bondage by human traditions and laws. This I have abundantly shown elsewhere.

But if you wish to enter the lists, I am prepared to discuss the point with you, and to fight it out, though upon these subjects I have books extant not a few. But the laws of the popes, you say, may at the same time be borne with and observed in charity, if perchance thus eternal salvation by the word of God and the peace of the world may together consist without tumult. I have said before, that cannot be.

The prince of this world will not allow the pope and his high priests and their laws to be observed in liberty, but his design is to entangle and bind consciences. This the true God will not bear. Therefore the word of God and the traditions of men are opposed to each other with implacable discord, no less so than God himself and Satan, who each destroy the works and overthrow the doctrines of the other, as regal kings each destroying the kingdom of the other.

He that is not with me, saith Christ, is against me. Luke 11.23. And as to a fear that many who are depravedly inclined will abuse this liberty, this must be considered among those tumults as part of that temporal leprosy which is to be borne, and of that evil which is to be endured. But these are not to be considered of so much consequence as that for the sake of restraining their abuse, the word of God should be taken out of the way.

For if all cannot be saved, yet some are saved. For whose sake the word of God is sent? And these on that account love it the more fervently, and assent to it the more solemnly. For what evils did not impious men commit before, where there was no word? Nay, what good did they do? Was not the world always drowned in war, fraud, violence, discord, and every kind of iniquity? For if Micah 7.4 compares the best among them to a thorn hedge, what do you suppose he would call the rest? But now the gospel is come, men begin to impute unto it that the world is evil, whereas the truth is that by the good gospel it is more manifest how evil it was, while without the gospel it did all its works in darkness.

Thus also the illiterate attribute it to learning that by its flourishing their ignorance becomes known. This is the return we make for the word of life and salvation. And what fear must we suppose there was among the Jews when the gospel freed all from the law of Moses? What occasion did not this great liberty seem to give to evil men? But yet the gospel was not on that account taken away, but the impious were left, and it was preached to the pious that they might not use their liberty as an occasion of the flesh.

Galatians 5.13 Nor is this part of your advice or your remedy to any purpose, where you say, It is lawful to speak the truth, but it is not expedient, either before everyone, or at all times, or in every manner. And ridiculously enough you add Paul, where he says, All things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient. 1 Corinthians 6.12 But Paul does not there speak of teaching doctrine or the truth, as you would confound his words and twist them which way you please.

On the contrary, he will have the truth spoken everywhere, at all times, and in every manner, so that he even rejoices that Christ is preached even through envy and strife. Nay, he declares in

plain words that he rejoices. Let Christ be preached in any way.

Philippians 1.15-18 Paul is speaking of facts and the use of doctrine, that is, of those who, seeking their own, had no consideration of the hurt and offense given to the weak. Truth and doctrine are to be preached always, openly and firmly, and are never to be dissembled or concealed. For there is no offense in them.

They are the staff of uprightness. And who gave you the power or committed to you the right of confining the Christian doctrine to persons, places, times, and causes, when Christ wills it to be proclaimed, and to reign freely throughout the world? For Paul saith, The word of God is not bound. 2 Timothy 2.9. But Erasmus bounds the word.

Nor did God give us the word that it should be had with respect of places, persons, or times. For Christ saith, Go ye out into the whole world. He does not say, as Erasmus does, Go to this place and not to that.

Again, preach the gospel to every creature. Mark 16.15. He does not say, Preach it to some, and not to others. In a word, you enjoin in the administration of the word of God a respect of persons, a respect of places, a respect of customs, and a respect of times.

Whereas the one and a special part of the glory of the word consists in this, that, as Paul saith, there is with it no respect of persons, and that God is no respecter of persons. You see, therefore, again, how rashly you run against the word of God, as though you preferred far before it your own counsel and cogitations. Hence, if we should demand of you that you would determine for us the times in which, the persons to whom, and the manner in which the truth is to be spoken, when would you come to an end? The world would sooner compute the termination of time and its own end, than you would settle upon any one certain rule.

In the meantime, where would remain the duty of teaching? Where that of teaching the soul? And how could you, who know nothing of the nature of persons, times, and manner, determine upon any rule at all? And even if you should know them perfectly, yet you could not know the hearts of men. Unless with you the manner, the time, and the person be this, teaching the truth so that the Pope be not indignant, Caesar be not enraged, and that many be not offended and made worse. But what kind of counsel this is, you have seen above.

I have thus rhetorically figured away in these vain words, lest you should appear to have said nothing at all. How much better is it for us wretched men to ascribe unto God, who knoweth the hearts of all men, the glory of determining the manner in which, the persons to whom, and the times in which, the truth is to be spoken. For he knoweth what is to be spoken to each, and when, and how it is to be spoken.

He then determines that his gospel which is necessary unto all, should be confined to no place, no time, but that it should be preached unto all, at all times, and in all places. And I have already proved, that those things which are handed down to us in the scriptures, are such, that they are quite plain and wholesome, and of necessity to be proclaimed abroad, even as you yourself determined in your Periclesis was right to be done, and that with much more wisdom than you advise now. But let those who would not that souls should be redeemed, such as the Pope and his adherents, let it be left to them to bind the word of God, and hinder men from life and the kingdom

of heaven, that they might neither enter in themselves, nor suffer others to enter, to whose fury you, Erasmus, by this advice of yours, are perniciously subservient.

Section 22. Of the same stamp with this, is that prudence of yours also, with which you next give it as your advice, that, if anything were settled upon in the councils that was wrong, it ought not to be openly confessed, lest a handle should be thereby afforded for contending the authority of the fathers. This, indeed, is just what the Pope wished you to say, and he hears it with greater pleasure than the gospel itself, and will be a most ungrateful wretch if he do not honour you in return with a cardinal's cap, together with all the revenues belonging to it.

But in the meantime, friend Erasmus, what will the souls do that shall be bound and murdered by that iniquitous statute? Is that nothing to you? But, however, you always think, or pretend to think, that human statutes can be observed together with the word of God without peril. If they could, I would at once go over to this your sentiment. But if you are yet in ignorance, I will tell you again that human statutes cannot be observed together with the word of God, because the former bind consciences, the latter loses them.

They are directly opposed to each other as fire to water, unless, indeed, they could be observed in liberty, that is, not to bind the conscience. But this the Pope wills not, nor can he will it, unless he wishes his kingdom to be destroyed and brought to an end. For that stands only in ensnaring and binding those consciences which the gospel pronounces free.

The authority of the fathers, therefore, is to be accounted not, and those statutes which have been wrongly enacted, as all have been that are not according to the word of God, are to be rent in sunder and cast away, for Christ is better than the authority of the fathers. In a word, if it be concerning the word of God that you think thus, you think impiously. If it be concerning other things, your verbose disputing about your sentiment is nothing to me.

I am disputing concerning the word of God." Section 23. In the last part of your preface, where you deter us from this kind of doctrine, you think your victory is almost gained. What you say can be more useless than that this paradox should be proclaimed openly to the world, that whatever is done by us is not done by free will, but from mere necessity.

And that of Augustine also, that God works in us both good and evil, that he rewards his good works in us, and punishes his evil works in us. You are mightily copious here in giving, or rather in expostulating concerning a reason. What a floodgate of iniquity, you say, would these things, publicly proclaimed, open unto men! What bad man would amend his life? Who would believe that he was loved of God? Who would war against his flesh? I wonder that in so great vehemency and contending zeal, you did not remember our main subject, and say, Where then would be found free will? My friend Erasmus, here again I also say, If you consider that these paradoxes are the inventions of men, why do you contend against them? Why are you so enraged? Against whom do you rail? Is there any man in the world at this day who has invaded more vehemently against the doctrines of men than Luther? This admonition of yours, therefore, is nothing to me.

But if you believe that those paradoxes are the words of God, where is your countenance, where is your shame, where is, I will not say your modesty, but that fear of, and that reverence which is due to the true God, when you say that nothing is more useless to be proclaimed than that word of God? What, shall your Creator come to learn of you, his creature, what is useful and what is not

useful to be preached? What, did that foolish and unwise God know not what is necessary to be taught until you, his instructor, prescribed to him the measure, according to which he should be wise, and according to which he should command? What, did he not know before you told him that that which you infer would be the consequence of this his paradox? If, therefore, God willed that such things should be spoken of and proclaimed abroad without regard to what would follow, who art thou that forbiddest it? The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, discourses on these same things, not in a corner, but in public and before the whole world, and that with a freely open mouth, nay, in the harshest terms, saying, Whom he will he hardeneth. Romans 9.18. And again, God willing to show forth his wrath, and so forth. Romans 9.22. What is more severe, that is, to the flesh, than the word of Christ? Many are called, but few chosen.

Matthew 22.14. And again, I know whom I have chosen. John 13.18. According to your judgment, then, all these things are such that nothing can be more uselessly spoken, because that by these things impious men may fall into desperation, hatred, and blasphemy. Here, then, I see, you suppose that the truth and the utility of the Scripture are to be weighed and judged of, according to the opinion of men, nay, of men the most impious, so that what pleases them, or seems bearable, should be deemed true, divine, and wholesome, and what has the contrary effect upon them, should at once be deemed useless, false, and pernicious.

What else do you mean by all this, than that the words of God should depend on, stand on, and fall by the will and authority of men? Whereas the Scripture, on the contrary, saith that all things stand and fall by the will and authority of God, and, in a word, that all the earth keeps silence before the face of the Lord. Habakkuk 2.20. He who could talk as you do must imagine that the living God is on a certain rostrum, whose words you may, if you be disposed, interpret, understand, and refute as you please, because he merely spoke as he saw a set of impious men to be moved and affected. Here you plainly discover how much your advice above, that the majesty of the judgments of God should be revered, was from your heart.

There, when we were speaking of the doctrines of the Scripture only, where there was no need of reverencing things abstruse and hidden, because there were no such doctrines, you awed us in the most religious terms with the darkness of the Caricchian cavern, lest we should rush forward with too much curiosity, so that, by the awe, you well nigh frightened us from reading the Scriptures altogether, to the reading of which Christ and his apostles urge and persuade us, as well as you do yourself elsewhere. But here, where we are come not to the doctrines of the Scripture, not to the Caricchian cavern only, but to the very and greatly to be revered secrets of the divine majesty, namely, why he works thus. Here, as they say, you burst open all bars and rush in, all but openly blasphemy.

What indignation against God do you not discover, because you cannot see his reason why, and his design in this his counsel? Why do you not here frame as an excuse obscurity and ambiguity? Why do you not restrain yourself and deter others from trying into these things which God wills should be hidden from us, and which he has not delivered to us in the Scriptures? It is here the hand is to be laid upon the mouth. It is here we are to reverence what lies hidden, to adore the secret counsels of the divine majesty, and to exclaim with Paul, Who art thou, O man, that contendest with God? Romans 9.20. Section 24. Who, you say, will endeavor to amend his life? I answer, No man, no man can.

For your self-amenders without the Spirit God regardeth not, for they are hypocrites. But the elect and those that fear God will be amended by the Holy Spirit. The rest will perish unamended.

Nor does Augustine say that the works of none, nor that the works of all are crowned, but the works of some. Therefore there will be some who shall amend their lives. Who will believe, you say, that he is loved of God? I answer, No man will believe it, no man can.

But the elect shall believe it. The rest shall perish without believing it, filled with indignation and blaspheming, as you here describe them. Therefore there will be some who shall believe it.

And as to your saying that by these doctrines the flood-gate of iniquity is thrown open unto men, be it so. They pertain to that leprosy of evil to be born, spoken of before. Nevertheless, by the same doctrines there is thrown open to the elect and to them that fear God a gate unto righteousness, an entrance into heaven, a way unto God.

But if, according to your advice, we should refrain from these doctrines and should hide from men this word of God, so that each, deluded by a false persuasion of salvation, should never learn to fear God, should never be humbled, in order that through this fear he might come to grace and love, then indeed we should shut up your flood-gate to purpose. For in the room of it we should throw open to ourselves and to all wide gates, nay, yawning chasms and sweeping tides, not only unto iniquity, but unto the depths of hell. Thus we should not enter into heaven ourselves, and them that are entering in we should hinder.

What utility, therefore, you say, is there in or necessity for proclaiming such things openly, when so many evils seem likely to proceed therefrom? I answer, it were enough to say, God has willed, that they should be proclaimed openly. But the reason of the divine will is not to be inquired into, but simply to be adored, and the glory to be given unto God, who, since he alone is just and wise, doth evil to no one, and can do nothing rashly or inconsiderately, although it may appear far otherwise unto us. With this answer those that fear God are content.

But that, from the abundance of answering, matter which I have, I may say a little more than this, which might suffice. There are two causes which require such things to be preached. The first is the humbling of our pride, and the knowledge of the grace of God.

The second is Christian faith itself. First, God has promised certainly his grace to the humbled, that is, to the self-deploring and despairing. But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled until he comes to know that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsel, endeavors, will, and works, and absolutely depending on the will, counsel, pleasure, and work of another, that is, of God only.

For if, as long as he has any persuasion that he can do even the least thing himself towards his own salvation, he retain a confidence in himself and do not utterly despair in himself, so long he is not humbled before God. But he proposes to himself some place, some time, or some work, whereby he may at length attain unto salvation. But he who hesitates not to depend wholly upon the good will of God, he totally despairs in himself, choosing nothing for himself, but waits for God to work in him.

And such an one is the nearest unto grace that he might be saved. These things, therefore, are openly proclaimed for the sake of the elect, that being by these means humbled and brought down to nothing, they might be saved. The rest resist this humiliation.

Nay, they condemn the teaching of self-desperation. They wish to have left a little something that they may do themselves. These secretly remain proud and adversaries to the grace of God.

This, I say, is one reason that those who fear God being humbled might know, call upon, and receive the grace of God. The other reason is that faith is in things not seen. Therefore, that there might be room for faith, it is necessary that all those things which are believed should be hidden.

But they are not hidden more deeply than under the contrary of sight, sense, and experience. Thus, when God makes alive, he does it by killing. When he justifies, he does it by bringing in guilty.

When he exalts to heaven, he does it by bringing down to hell. As the scriptures sayeth, the Lord killeth and maketh alive, he bringeth down to the grave, and raiseth up. First Samuel 2, 6. Concerning which, there is no need that I should hear speak more at large.

For those who read my writings are well acquainted with these things. Thus he conceals his eternal mercy and loving kindness behind his eternal wrath, his righteousness behind apparent iniquity. This is the highest degree of faith, to believe that he is merciful, who saves so few and damns so many.

To believe him just, who according to his own will makes us necessarily damnable, that he may seem, as Erasmus says, to delight in the torments of the miserable, and to be an object of hatred rather than of love. If, therefore, I could by any means comprehend how that same God can be merciful and just, who carries the appearance of so much wrath and iniquity, there would be no need of faith. But now, since that cannot be comprehended, there is room for exercising faith, while such things are preached and openly proclaimed.

In the same manner as, while God kills, the faith of life is exercised in death, suffice it to have said thus much upon your preface. In this way we shall more rightly consult, for the benefit of those who dispute upon these paradoxes, than according to your way, whereby you wish to indulge there in piety by silence and a refraining from saying anything, which is to no profit whatever. For if you believe, or even suppose these things to be true, seeing they are paradoxes of no small moment, such is the insatiable desire of mortals to search into secret things, and the more so the more we desire to keep them secret, that by this admonition of yours you will absolutely make them public.

For all will now much more desire to know whether these paradoxes be true or not. Thus they will, by your contending zeal, be so roused to inquiry that not one of us ever afforded such a handle for making them known, as you yourself have done by this over-religious and zealous admonition. You would have acted much more prudently had you said nothing at all about being cautious in mentioning these paradoxes, if you wished to see your desire accomplished.

But since you do not directly deny that they are true, your aim is frustrated. They cannot be concealed, for by their appearance of truth they will draw all men to search into them. Therefore either deny that they are true altogether, or else hold your own tongue first, if you wish others to hold theirs.

Section 25. As to the other paradox you mentioned, that whatever is done by us is not done by free will but from mere necessity, let us briefly consider this, lest we should suffer anything most

perniciously spoken to pass by unnoticed. Here then I observe that if it be proved that our salvation is apart from our own strength and counsel, and depends on the working of God alone, which I hope I shall clearly prove hereafter, in the course of this discussion, does it not evidently follow that when God is not present with us to work in us, everything that we do is evil? And that we of necessity do those things which are of no avail unto salvation? For if it is not we ourselves but God only that works salvation in us, it must follow, whether or no, that we do nothing unto salvation before the working of God in us.

But by necessity I do not mean compulsion, but as they term it, the necessity of immutability, not of compulsion. That is, a man void of the Spirit of God does not evil against his will as by violence, or as if he were taken by the neck and forced to it, in the same way as a thief or cutthroat is dragged to punishment against his will. But he does it spontaneously, and with a desirous willingness, and this willingness and desire of doing evil, he cannot by his own power leave off, restrain, or change.

But it goes on still desiring and craving. And even if he should be compelled by force to do anything outwardly to the contrary, yet the craving will within remains averse to, and rises in indignation against, that which forces or resists it. But it would not rise in indignation if it were changed, and made willing to yield to a constraining power.

This is what we mean by the necessity of immutability, that the will cannot change itself, nor give itself another bent. But rather, the more it is resisted, the more it is irritated to crave, as is manifest from its indignation. This would not be the case if it were free, or had a free will.

Ask experience how hardened against all persuasion they are whose inclinations are fixed upon any one thing. For if they yield at all, they yield through force, or through something attended with greater advantage. They never yield willingly, and if their inclinations be not thus fixed, they let all things pass and go on just as they will.

But again, on the other hand, when God works in us, the will, being changed and sweetly breathed on by the Spirit of God, desires and acts not from compulsion, but responsively, from pure willingness, inclination, and accord, so that it cannot be turned another way by anything contrary, nor be compelled or overcome even by the gates of hell. But it still goes on to desire, crave after, and love that which is good, even as before it desired, craved after, and loved that which was evil. This again experience proves how invincible and unshaken are holy men when, by violence and other oppressions, they are only compelled and irritated the more to crave after good, even as fire is rather fanned into flames than extinguished by the wind.

So that neither is there here any willingness, or free will, to turn itself into another direction, or to desire anything else, while the influence of the Spirit and grace of God remain in the man. In a word, if we be under the God of this world, without the operation and Spirit of God, we are led captives by him at his will, as Paul saith, 2 Timothy 2.26, so that we cannot will anything but that which he wills. For he is that strong man armed, who so keepeth his palace, that those whom he holds captive are kept in peace, that they might not cause any motion or feeling against him.

Otherwise, the kingdom of Satan, being divided against itself, could not stand, whereas Christ affirms it does stand. And all this we do willingly and desiringly, according to the nature of will. For if it were forced, it would be no longer will, for compulsion is, so to speak, unwillingness.

But if the stronger than he come and overcome him, and take us as his spoils, then through the Spirit we are his servants and captives, which is the royal liberty, that we may desire and do willingly what he wills. Thus the human will is, as it were, a beast between two. If God sit thereon, it wills and goes where God will.

As the psalm saith, I am become, as it were, a beast before thee, and I am continually with thee. Psalm 73, 22 and 23. If Satan sit thereon, it wills and goes as Satan will.

Nor is it in the power of its own will to choose to which rider it will run, nor which it will seek. But the riders themselves contend which shall have and hold it. Section 26.

And now, what if I prove from your own words on which you assert the freedom of the will, that there is no such thing as free will at all? What if I should make it manifest that you unknowingly deny that which with so much policy you labor to affirm? And if I do not this actually, I vow that I will consider all that I advance in this book against you revoked, and all that your diatribe advances against me and aims at establishing confirmed. You make the power of free will to be that certain small degree of power which, without the grace of God, is utterly ineffective. Do you not acknowledge this? Now then, I ask and demand of you, if the grace of God be wanting, or if it be taken away from that certain small degree of power, what can it do of itself? It is ineffective, you say, and can do nothing of good.

Therefore it cannot do what God or His grace wills. And why? Because we have now separated the grace of God from it. And what the grace of God does not, is not good.

And hence it follows that free will, without the grace of God, is absolutely not free, but immutably the servant and bond-slave of evil, because it cannot turn itself unto good. This being determined, I will allow you to make the power of free will not only a certain small degree of power, but to make it evangelical, if you will, or, if you can, to make it divine, provided that you add to it this doleful appendage, that without the grace of God it is ineffective, because then you will at once take from it all power, for what is ineffective power, but plainly no power at all? Therefore, to say that the will is free, and that it has indeed power, but that it is ineffective, is what the sophists call a direct contrariety, as if one should say free will is that which is not free, or as if one should term fire cold and earth hot, for if fire had the power of heat, yea, if the earth of hell, yet if it did not burn or scorch, but were cold and produced cold, I should not call it fire, much less should I term it hot, unless indeed you were to mean an imaginary fire or a fire represented in a picture. But if we call the power of free will, that by which a man is fitted to be caught by the spirit, or to be touched by the grace of God, as one created unto eternal life or eternal death may be said to be, this power, that is fitness, or as a sophist term it disposition quality and passive aptitude, this I also confess.

And who does not know that this is not in trees or beasts, for, as they say, heaven was not made for geese? Therefore it stands confirmed, even by your own testimony, that we do all things from necessity, not from free will, seeing that the power of free will is nothing, and neither does nor can do good without grace, unless you wish efficacy to bear a new signification, to be understood as meaning perfection, that is, that free will can indeed will and begin, but cannot perfect, which I do not believe, and upon this I shall speak more at large hereafter. It now then follows that free will is plainly a divine term, and can be applicable to none but the divine majesty only, for he alone doth, as the psalm sings, what he will in heaven and earth, psalm 135, 6, whereas if it be ascribed unto

men, it is not more properly ascribed than the divinity of God himself would be ascribed unto them, which would be the greatest of all sacrilege. Wherefore it becomes theologians to refrain from the use of this term altogether, whenever they wish to speak of human ability, and to leave it to be applied to God only, and, moreover, to take this same term out of the mouths and speech of men, and thus to assert, as it were, for their God, that which belongs to his own sacred and holy name.

But if they must, whether or no, give some power to men, let them teach that it is to be called by some other term than free will, especially since we know and clearly see that the people are miserably deceived and seduced by that term, taking and understanding it to signify something far different from that which theologians mean and understand by it in their discussions. For the term free will is far too grand, copious, and full, by which the people imagine is signified, as the force and nature of the term requires, that power which can freely turn itself as it will, and such a power as is under the influence of and subject to no one. Whereas if they knew that it was quite otherwise, and that by that term scarcely the least spark or degree of power was signified, and that, utterly ineffective of itself, being the servant and bond-slave of the devil, it would not be at all surprising if they should stone us as mockers and deceivers, who said one thing and meant something quite different, nay, who left it uncertain and unintelligible what we meant.

For he who speaks sophistically, the wise man saith, is hated, and especially if he does so in things pertaining to godliness, where eternal salvation is at stake. Since therefore we have lost the signification of so grand a term and the thing signified by it, or rather never had them at all, which the Pelagians may heartily wish had been the case, being themselves eluded by this term, why do we so tenaciously hold an empty word, to that peril and mockery of the believing people? There is no more wisdom in so doing than there is in kings and potentates retaining or claiming and boasting of empty titles of kingdoms and countries, when they are at the same time mere beggars, and anything but the possessors of those kingdoms and countries. But, however, this is bearable, since they deceive and mock no one thereby, but only feed themselves on vanity without any profit.

But here is a peril of salvation, and the most destructive mockery. Who would not laugh at, or rather hold up to hatred, that most untimely innovator of terms, who, contrary to all established use, should attempt to introduce such a mode of speaking as by the term beggar, to have understood wealthy, not because such a one has any wealth himself, but because some king may, perchance, give him his wealth? And what if such a one should really do this, not by any figure of speech, as by paraphrase or irony, but in plain serious meaning? In the same way, speaking of one sick unto death, he may wish to be understood as meaning one in perfect health, giving this as his reason, because the one may give the other his health. So also he may, by illiterate idiot, mean most learned, because some other may, perchance, give him his learning.

Of precisely the same nature is this. Man has a free will, for this reason, if perchance God should give him his. By this abuse of the manner of speaking, any one may boast that he has anything, that he is the Lord of heaven and earth, if perchance God should give this unto him.

But this is not the way in which theologians should proceed. This is the way of stage players and public informers. Our words ought to be proper words, pure and sober, and, as Paul saith, sound speech that cannot be condemned.

But if we do not like to leave out this term altogether, which would be most safe, and also most religious, we may nevertheless with a good conscience teach, that it be used so far as to allow man a free will, not in respect of those which are above him, but in respect only of those things which are below him. That is, he may be allowed to know that he has as to his goods and possessions the right of using, acting, and omitting according to his free will, although at the same time that same free will is overruled by the free will of God alone, just as he pleases. But that Godward, or in things which pertain unto salvation or damnation, he has no free will, but is captive, slave, and servant, either to the will of God or to the will of Satan.

Section 27 These observations have I made upon the heads of your preface, which indeed themselves may more properly be said to embrace the whole subject than the following body of the book. But, however, the whole of these observations in reply might have been summed up and made in this one short compendious answer to you. Your preface complains either of the words of God or of the word of men.

If of the words of men the whole is written in vain, if of the words of God, the whole is impious. Therefore it would have saved much trouble if it had been plainly mentioned whether we were disputing concerning the words of God or the words of men. But this perhaps will be handled in the exordium which follows, or in the body of the discussion itself.

But the hints which you have thrown together in the conclusion of your preface have no weight whatever. Such as you are calling my doctrines fables and useless, and saying that Christ crucified should rather be preached after the example of Paul, that wisdom is to be taught among them that are perfect, that the language of Scripture is attempered to the various capacities of hearers, and you are therefore thinking that it should be left to the prudence and charity of the teacher to teach that which may be profitable to his neighbor. All this you advance senselessly, and away from the purpose.

For rather do we teach anything but Christ crucified. But Christ crucified brings all these things along with himself, and that wisdom also among them that are perfect. For there is no other wisdom to be taught among Christians than that which is hidden in a mystery.

And this belongs to the perfect, and not to the sons of the Jewish and legal generation, who, without faith, glory in their works, as Paul 1 Corinthians 2 seems to think. Unless by preaching Christ crucified, you mean nothing else but calling out these words, Christ is crucified. And as to your observing that God is represented as being angry, in a fury, hating, grieving, pitying, repenting, neither of which nevertheless ever takes place in him, this is only purposely stumbling on plain ground.

For these things neither render the scriptures obscure, nor necessary to be attempered to the various capacities of hearers, except that many like to make obscurities where there are none. For these things are no more than grammatical particulars, and certain figures of speech, with which even schoolboys are acquainted. But we, in this disputation, are contending not about grammatical figures, but about doctrines of truth.

## 04 - Sections 28-40: Exordium

---

Sections 28 through 40 of the *Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther, translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain. Exordium.

Section 28. At your entrance, then, upon the disputation, you promise that you will go according to the canonical scriptures, and that because Luther is swayed by the authority of no other writer whatever. Very well, I receive your promise.

But, however, you do not make the promise on this account, because you judge that these same writers are of no service to your subject, but that you might not enter upon a field of labor in vain. For you do not, I know, quite approve of this audacity of mine, or by what other term soever you choose to designate this my mode of discussion. For you say, So great a number of the most learned men, approved by the consent of so many ages, has no little weight with you, among whom were some of the most extensively acquainted with the sacred writings, and also some of the most holy martyrs, many renowned for miracles, together with their more recent theologians, and so many colleges, councils, bishops, and popes.

So that, in a word, on your side of the balance are, you say, learning, genius, multitude, greatness, highness, fortitude, sanctity, miracles, and what not, but that on my side are only a Wycliffe and a Laurentius Vala, although Augustine also, whom you pass by, is wholly on my side, who, in comparison with the others, are of no weight whatever. That Luther, therefore, stands alone, a private individual, an upstart with his followers, in whom there is neither that learning, nor that genius, nor multitude, nor magnitude, nor sanctity, nor miracles. For they have not ability enough, you say, to cure a lame horse.

They make a show of scripture, indeed, concerning which, however, they are as much in doubt as those on the other side of the question. They boast of the spirit also, which, however, they never show forth, and many other things which, from the length of your tongue, you are able to enumerate in great profusion. But these things have no effect upon us.

For we say to you, as the wolf did to the nightingale which he devoured, you are sound, and that is all. They say, you observe, and upon this only they would have us believe them. I confess, my friend Erasmus, that you may well be swayed by all these.

These had much weight with me for upwards of ten years, that I think no other mortal was ever so much under their sway. And I myself thought it incredible that this Troy of ours, which had for so long a time, and through so many wars, stood invincible, could ever be taken. And I call God for a record upon my soul, that I should have continued so, and have been under the same influence even unto this day, had not an urging conscience, and an evidence of things, forced me into a different path.

And you may easily imagine that my heart was not of stone, and that, if it had been of stone, it would at least have been softened in struggling against so many tides, and being dashed to and

fro by so many waves, when I was daring that which, if I accomplished, I saw that the whole authority of those whom you have just enumerated would be poured down upon my head like an overwhelming flood. But this is not a time for setting forth a history of my own life or works. Nor have I undertaken this discussion for the purpose of commending myself, but that I might exalt the grace of God, what I am, and with what spirit and design I have been led to these things, I leave to him who knows, that all this is carrying on according to his own free will, not according to mine, though even the world itself ought to have found that out already.

And certainly, by this exhortium of yours, you throw me into a very offensive situation, out of which, unless I speak in favor of myself, and to the disparagement of so many fathers, I shall not easily extricate myself. But I will do it in a few words. According to your own judgment of me, then, I stand apart from all such learning, talents, multitude, authority, and everything else of the kind.

Now, if I were to demand of you these three things, what is the manifestation of the Spirit? What are miracles? What is sanctification? As far as I have known from your letters and books, you would appear so great a novice and ignoramus that you would not be able to give three syllables of explanation. Or, if I should put it to you closely and demand of you, which one among all those of whom you boast, you could to a certainty bring forth, either as being or having been a saint, or as having possessed the Spirit, or as having wrought miracles, I apprehend you would have hot work of it and all in vain. You bring forth many things that have been handed about in common use and in public sermons, but you do not credit how much of their weight and authority they lose when they are brought to the judgment of conscience.

There is an old proverb, many were accounted saints on earth whose souls are now in hell. Section 29 But we will grant you, if you please, that they were all saints, that they all had the Spirit, that they all wrought miracles, which, however, you do not require. But tell me this, was any one of them made a saint? Did any one of them receive the Spirit or work miracles in the name or by virtue of free will, or to confirm the doctrine of free will? Far be such a thought, you will say.

But in the name and by virtue of Jesus Christ, and for the confirmation of the doctrine of Christ, all these things were done. Why then do you bring forward the sanctity, the Spirit, and the miracles of these in confirmation of the doctrine of free will, for which they were not wrought and given? Their miracles, Spirit, and sanctity, therefore, belong to us who preach Jesus Christ, and not the ability and works of men. And now, what wonder if those who were thus holy, spiritual, and wonderful for miracles were sometimes under the influence of the flesh, and spoke and wrought according to the flesh, since that happened not once only to the very apostles under Christ himself.

For you do not deny but assert that free will does not belong to the Spirit or to Christ, but is human, so that the Spirit who is promised to glorify Christ cannot preach free will. If, therefore, the fathers have at any time preached free will, they have certainly spoken from the flesh, seeing they were men, not from the Spirit of God. Much less did they work miracles for its confirmation.

Wherefore, your allegation concerning the sanctity, the Spirit, and the miracles of the fathers is nothing to the purpose, because free will is not proved thereby but the doctrine of Jesus Christ against the doctrine of free will. But come, show forth still, you that are on the side of free will, and assert that a doctrine of this kind is true, that is, that it proceeds from the Spirit of God. Show forth still, I say, the Spirit.

Still work miracles. Still evidence sanctity. Certainly, you who make the assertion this to us who deny these things, the Spirit, sanctity, and miracles ought not to be demanded of us who maintain the negative, but from you who assert in the affirmative.

The negative proposes nothing, is nothing, and is bound to prove nothing, nor ought to be proved. It is the affirmative that ought to be proved. You assert the power of free will and the human cause, but no miracle was ever seen or heard of as proceeding from God in support of a doctrine of the human cause, only in support of the doctrines of the divine cause.

And we are commanded to receive no doctrine whatever that is not first proved by signs from on high. Deuteronomy 18, 15 through 22. Nay, the scripture calls man vanity and a lie, which is nothing less than saying that all human things are vanities and lies.

Come forward then, come forward, I say, and prove that your doctrine proceeding from human vanity and a lie is true. Where is now your showing forth the spirit? Where is your sanctity? Where are your miracles? I see your talents, your erudition, and your authority, but those things God has given alike unto all the world. But, however, we will not compel you to work great miracles, nor to cure a lame horse, lest you should plead as an excuse the carnality of the age.

Although God is wont to confirm his doctrines by miracles without any respect to the carnality of the age, nor is he at all moved either by the merits or demerits of a carnal age, but by pure mercy and grace, and the love of souls which are to be confirmed by solid truth unto their glory. But we give you the choice of working any miracles, as small and one as you please. But come, I, in order to irritate your bale into action, insult and challenge you to create even one frog in the name and by virtue of free will, of which the Gentile and impious Magi in Egypt could create many.

I will not put you to the task of creating lice, which neither could they produce. But I will descend a little lower yet. Take even one flea or louse, for you tempt and deride our God by your curing of the lame horse.

And if, after you have combined all the powers and concentrated all the efforts both of your God and your advocates, you can in the name and by virtue of free will kill it, you shall be victors. Your cause shall be established, and we also will immediately come over and adore that God of yours, that wonderful killer of the louse. Not that I deny that you could even remove mountains.

But it is one thing to say that a certain thing was done by free will, and another to prove it. And what I have said concerning miracles, I say also concerning sanctity. If you can, out of such a series of ages, men, and all the things which you have mentioned, show forth one work, if it be but the lifting of a straw from the earth, or one word, if it be but the syllable my, or one thought of free will, if it be but the faintest sigh, by which men applied themselves unto grace, or by which they have merited the Spirit, or by which they have obtained pardon, or by which they have prevailed with God even in the smallest degree, I say nothing about being sanctified thereby.

Again I say, you shall be victors, and we vanquished, and that, as I repeat, in the name and by virtue of free will. For what things soever are wrought in men by the power of divine creation are supported by Scripture testimonies in abundance. And certainly, you ought to produce the same, unless you would appear such ridiculous teachers as to spread abroad throughout the world with so much arrogance and authority, doctrines concerning that of which you cannot produce one

proof.

For such doctrines will be called mere dreams, which are followed by nothing, than which nothing can be more disgraceful to men of so many ages, so great, so learned, so holy, and so miraculous. And if this be the case, we shall rank even the Stoics before you. For although they took upon them to describe such a wise man as they never saw, yet they did attempt to set forth some part of the character.

But you cannot set forth anything whatever, not even the shadow of your doctrine. The same also, I observe, concerning the Spirit. If you can produce one out of all the assertors of free will, whoever had a strength of mind and affection, even in the smallest degree, so as, in the name and by virtue of free will, to be able to disregard one farthing, or to be willing to be without one farthing, or to bear one word or sign of injury, I do not speak of the Stoical contempt of riches, life, and fame.

Again, the palm of victory shall be yours, and we, as the vanquished, will willingly pass under the spear. And these proofs, you, who with such trumpeting mouths sound forth the power of free will, are bound to produce before us. Or else, again, you will appear to be striving to give establishment to a nothing, or to be acting like him who sat to see a play in an empty theatre.

Section 30 But I will easily prove to you the contrary of all this, that such holy men as you boast of, whenever they approach God, either to pray or to do, approach him utterly forgetful of their own free will and despairing of themselves, crying unto him for pure grace only, feeling at the same time that they deserve everything that is contrary. In this state was Augustine often, and in the same state was Bernard, when at the point of death he said, I have lost my time because I have lived wrong. I do not see here that there was any power spoken of which could apply itself unto grace, but that all power was condemned as being only a verse, although those same saints, at the time when they disputed concerning free will, spoke otherwise.

And the same I see has happened unto all, that when they are engaged in words and disputations, they are one thing, but another when they come to experience and practice. In the former, they speak differently from what they felt before. In the latter, they feel differently from what they spoke before.

But men, good as well as bad, are to be judged of more from what they feel than from what they say. But we will indulge you still further. We will not require miracles, the spirit, and sanctity.

We return to the doctrine itself. We only require this of you, that you would at least explain to us what work, what word, what thought, that power of free will can move, attempt, or perform in order to apply itself unto grace. For it is not enough to say there is, there is, there is a certain power of free will, for what is more easily said than this.

Nor does such a way of proceeding become men the most learned and the most holy, who have been approved by so many ages, but must be called baby-like, as we say in a German proverb. It must be defined what that power is, what it can do, in what it is passive and what takes place. To give you an example, for I shall press you most homely, this is what is required.

Whether that power must pray, or fast, or labor, or chastise the body, or give alms, or what other work of this kind it must do or attempt. For if it be a power it must do some kind of work. But here

you are more dumb than serifian frogs and fishes.

And how should you give the definition when, according to your own testimony, you are at an uncertainty about the power itself, at difference among each other, and inconsistent with yourselves? And what must become of the definition when the thing to be defined has no consistency in itself? But be it so that since the time of Plato you are at length agreed among yourselves concerning the power itself, and that its work may be defined to be praying, or fasting, or something of the same kind, which perhaps still lies undiscovered in the ideas of Plato. Who shall certify us that such is truth, that it pleases God, and that we are doing right in safety? Especially when you yourselves assert that there is a human cause which has not the testimony of the Spirit, because of its having been handled by philosophers, and having existed in the world before Christ came, and before the Spirit was sent down from heaven. It is most certain, then, that this doctrine was not sent down from heaven with the Spirit, but sprang from the earth long before, and therefore there is need of weighty testimony whereby it may be confirmed to be true and sure.

We will grant, therefore, that we, our private individuals, and few, and you, public characters, and many, we ignorant, and you the most learned, we stupid, and you the most acute, we creatures of yesterday, and you older than Deucalion, we never received, and you approved by so many ages. In a word, we sinners, carnal, and dolts, and you awe-striking, to the very devils for your sanctity, spirit, and miracles. Yet allow us the right, at least, of Turks and Jews to ask of you that reason for your doctrine, which your favorite Peter has commanded you to give.

We ask it of you in the most modest way, that is, we do not require it to be proved by sanctity, by the Spirit, and by miracles, which, however, we could do in our own right, seeing that you yourselves require that of others. Nay, we even indulge you so far as not to require you to produce any example of a work, a word, or a thought, in confirmation of your doctrine, but only to explain to us the doctrine itself, and merely to tell us plainly what you would have to be understood by it, and what the form of it is. If you will not or cannot do this, then let us at least attempt to set forth an example of it ourselves.

For you are as bad as the Pope himself and his followers, who say, you are to do as we say, but not to do as we do. In the same manner, you say that that power requires a work to be done, and so we shall be set on to work while you remain at your ease. But will you not grant us this, that the more you are in numbers, the longer you are in standing, the greater you are, the farther you are on all accounts superior to us, the more disgraceful it is to you that we, who in every respect are as nothing in your eyes, should desire to learn and practice your doctrine, and that you should not be able to prove it, either by any miracle, or by the killing of a louse, or by any the least motion of the spirit, or by any the least work of sanctity, nor even to bring forth any example of it, either in work or word, and further, a thing unheard of before, that you should not be able to tell us plainly of what form the doctrine is, and how it is to be understood.

O excellent teachers of free will, what are you now, but sound only? Who now, Erasmus, are they who boast of the spirit, but show it not forth? Who say only, and then wish men to believe them? Are not your friends they who are thus extolled to the skies, and who can say nothing, and yet boast of, and exact such great things? We entreat therefore, you and yours, my friend Erasmus, that you will allow us to stand aloof and tremble with fear, alarmed at the peril of our conscience, or at least to wave our assenting to a doctrine which, as you yourself see, even though you should

succeed to the utmost, and all your arguments should be proved and established, is nothing but an empty term, and the sounding of these syllables, there is a power of free will, there is a power of free will. Moreover, it still remains an uncertainty among your own friends themselves, whether it be a term even or not, for they differ from each other, and are inconsistent with themselves. It is most iniquitous therefore, nay, the greatest of miseries, that our consciences, which Christ has redeemed by his blood, should be tormented by the ghost of one term, and that a term which has no certainty in it.

And yet, if we should not suffer ourselves to be thus tormented, we should be held as guilty of unheard of pride, for disregarding so many fathers of so many ages who have asserted free will. Whereas the truth is, as you see from what has been said, they never defined anything whatever concerning free will. But the doctrine of free will is erected under the covering, and upon the basis of their name, of which nevertheless they can show no form, and for which they can fix no term, and thus they delude the world with a term that is a lie.

Section 31 In here, Erasmus, I call to your remembrance your own advice. You just now advised that questions of this kind be omitted, and that Christ crucified be rather taught, and those things which suffice unto Christian piety. But this we are now seeking after and doing.

What are we contending for, but that the simplicity and purity of the Christian doctrine should prevail, and that those things should be left and disregarded which have been invented and introduced with it by men? But you who give this advice do not act according to it yourself. Nay, you act contrary to it. You write diatribes, you exalt the decrees of the popes, you honor the authority of man, and you try all means to draw us aside into these strange things, and contrary to the holy scriptures.

But you consider not the things that are necessary, how that by so doing we should corrupt the simplicity and sincerity of the scriptures. And confound them with the added inventions of men, from which we plainly discover that you did not give us that advice from your heart, and that you write nothing seriously, but take it for granted that you can by the empty bowls of your words turn the world as you please. Whereas you turn them nowhere, for you say nothing whatever but mere contradictions in all things and everywhere.

So that he would be most correct who should call you the very Proteus himself, or Vertumnus, or should say with Christ, Physician, heal thyself. The teacher whose own faults his ignorance prove has need to hide his head. Until therefore you shall have proved your affirmative, we stand fast in our negative.

And in the judgment even of all that company of saints of whom you boast, or rather of the whole world, we dare to say and we glory in saying that it is our duty not to admit that which is nothing, and which cannot to a certainty be proved what it is. And you must all be possessed of incredible presumption or of madness to demand that to be admitted by us for no other reason than because you, as being many, great, and of long standing, choose to assert that which you yourselves acknowledge to be nothing, as though it were a conduct becoming Christian teachers to mock the miserable people in things pertaining to godliness with that which is nothing as if it were a matter that essentially concerned their salvation. Where is that former acumen of the Grecian talent which heretofore at least covered lies under some elegant assemblage of truth? It now lies in open and

naked words.

Where is that former dexterously labored latinity? It now thus deceives and is deceived by one most empty term. But thus it happens to the senseless or the malicious readers of books. All those things which were the infirmities of the fathers or of the saints they make to be of the highest authority.

The fault, therefore, is not in the authors but in the readers. It is as though one relying on the holiness and the authority of St. Peter should contend that all that St. Peter ever said was true and should even attempt to persuade us that it was truth when, Matthew 16, 22, from the infirmity of the flesh he advised Christ not to suffer. Or that where he commanded Christ to depart from him out of the ship, Luke 5, 8, and many other of those things for which he was rebuked of Christ.

Men of this sort are like unto them who, for the sake of ridicule, idly say that all things that are in the gospel are not true. And they catch hold of that, John 8, 48, where the Jews say unto Christ, Do we not say well that thou art a Samaritan and hast the devil? Or that he is guilty of death? Or that we found this fellow perverting our nation and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar? These do the same thing as those asserters of free will, but for a different end, and not willfully, but from blindness and ignorance. For they so catch at that which the fathers, failing by the infirmity of the flesh, have said in favor of free will, that they even oppose it to that which the same fathers have elsewhere in the power of the spirit, against free will.

Nay, they so urge and force it that the better is made to give way to the worse. Hence it comes to pass that they give authority to the worse expressions because they fall in with their fleshly mind, and take it from the better because they make against their fleshly mind. But why do we not rather select the better? For there are many such in the fathers.

To produce an example, what can be more carnally, nay, what more impiously, sacrilegiously, and blasphemously spoken than that which Jerome is wont to say, virginity, people's heaven, and marriage, the earth. As though the earth and not heaven was intended for the patriarchs, the apostles, and Christian husbands. Or as though heaven was designed for gentile, vestal virgins who are without Christ.

And yet these things and others of the same kind, the sophists, collect out of the fathers that they may procure unto them authority, carrying all things more by numbers than by judgment. As that disgusting carpenter of Constance did, who lately made that jewel of his, the stable of Augeas, a present to the public, that there might be a something to cause nausea and vomit in the pious and the learned. Section 32 And now, while I am making these observations, I will reply to that remark of yours where you say that it is not to be believed that God would overlook an error in his church for so many ages and not reveal to any one of his saints that which we contend for as being the grand essential of the Christian doctrine.

In the first place, we do not say that this error was overlooked of God in his church or in any one of his saints. For the church is ruled by the Spirit of God and the saints are led by the Spirit of God. Romans 8, 14 And Christ is with his church even unto the end of the world.

Matthew 28, 20 And the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. 1 Timothy 3, 15 These things I say we know, for the creed which we all hold runs thus, I believe in the holy Catholic church. So

that it is impossible that she can err even in the least article.

And even if we should grant that some of the elect are held in error through the whole of their life, yet they must of necessity return into the way of truth before their death. For Christ says, John 10, 28 No one shall pluck them out of my hand. But this is the labor, this is the point.

Whether it can be proved to a certainty that those whom you call the church were the church or rather whether having been in error throughout their whole life, they were at last brought back before death. For this will not easily be proved. If God suffered all those most learned men of whom you adduce to remain in error through so long a series of ages, therefore God suffered his church to be in error.

But look at the people of Israel where during so many kings and so long a time, not one king is mentioned who never was in error. And under Elijah the prophet, all the people and everything that was public among them had so gone away into idolatry that he thought that he himself was the only one left. Whereas while the kings, the princes, the prophets, and whatever could be called the people or the church of God was going to destruction, God was reserving to himself seven thousand, Romans 11 4. But who could see these or know them to be the people of God? And who even now dares to deny that God under all these great men, for you make mention of none but men in some high office or of some great name, was reserving to himself a church among the commonalty and suffering all those to perish after the example of the kingdom of Israel.

For it is peculiar to God to restrain the elect of Israel and to slay their fat ones, but to preserve the refuse and remnant of Israel. Psalm 78 31 Isaiah 1 9 10 20 through 22 11 11 through 16 What happened under Christ himself when all the apostles were offended at him, when he was denied and condemned by all the people, and there were only a Joseph, a Nicodemus, a thief upon the cross preserved? Were they then said to be the people of God? There was indeed a people of God remaining, but it was not called the people of God, and that which was so called was not the people of God. And who knows who are the people of God when throughout the whole world, from its origin, the state of the church was always such that those were called the people and saints of God who were not so, while others among them who were as a refuse and were not called the people and saints of God were the people and saints of God, as is manifest in the histories of Cain and Abel, of Ishmael and Isaac, of Esau and Jacob.

Look again at the age of the Arians when scarcely five Catholic bishops were preserved throughout the whole world, and they driven from their places while the Arians reigned everywhere, burying the public name and office of the church. Nevertheless, under these heretics, Christ preserved his church, but so that it was the least thought or considered to be the church. Again, show me, under the kingdom of the Pope, one bishop discharging his office.

Show me one council in which their transactions were concerning the things pertaining to godliness and not rather concerning gowns, dignities, revenues, and other baubles, which they could not say without being mad, pertain to the spirit. Nevertheless, they are called the church when all, at least who live as they do, must be reprobates and anything but the church. And yet, even under them, Christ preserved his church, though it was not called the church.

How many saints must you imagine those of the Inquisition have for some ages burnt and killed as John Hus and others, in whose time, no doubt, there lived many holy men of the same spirit. Why

do you not rather wonder at this, Erasmus, that there ever were from the beginning of the world more distinguished talents, greater erudition, more ardent pursuit among the world in general than among Christians or the people of God? As Christ himself declares, the children of this world are wiser than the children of light. Luke 16.8 What Christian can be compared, to say nothing of the Greeks, with Cicero alone for talents, for erudition, or for indefatigability? What shall we say, then, was the preventative cause that no one of them was able to attain unto grace, who certainly exerted free will with its utmost powers? Who dares say that there was no one among them who contended for the truth with all his efforts? And yet we must affirm that no one of them all attained unto it.

Will you here, too, say, it is not to be believed that God would utterly leave so many great men throughout such a series of ages and permit them to labor in vain? Certainly, if free will were anything, or could do anything, it must have appeared and wrought something in those men, at least in some one instance. But it availed nothing. Nay, it always wrought in the contrary direction.

Hence, by this argument only, it may be sufficiently proved that free will is nothing at all, since no proof of it can be produced even from the beginning of the world to the end. Section 33 But to return What wonder if God should leave all the elders of the church to go their own way, who thus permitted all the nations to go their own ways, as Paul saith, Acts 14.16 and 17.30. But, my friend Erasmus, the church of God indeed is not so common a thing as this term church of God, nor are the saints of God indeed everywhere to be found like the term saints of God. They are pearls and precious jewels which the spirit does not cast before swine, but which, as the scripture expresses it, he keeps hidden, that the wicked not see the glory of God.

Otherwise, if they were openly known of all, how could it come to pass that they should be thus vexed and afflicted in the world, as Paul saith, 1 Corinthians 2.8. Had they known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. I do not say these things because I deny that those whom you mention are the saints and church of God, but because it cannot be proved, if anyone should deny it, that they really are saints, but must be left quite in uncertainty, and because therefore the position deduced from their holiness is not sufficiently credible for the confirmation of my doctrine. I call them saints and look upon them as such.

I call them the church and look upon them as such, according to the law of charity, but not according to the law of faith. That is, charity, which always thinks the best of everyone and suspects not, but believeth and presumes all things for good concerning its neighbor, calls everyone who is baptized a saint. Nor is there any peril if she err, for charity is liable to err, seeing that she is exposed to all the uses and abuses of all, and universal handmaid to the good and to the evil, to the believing and to the unbelieving, to the true and to the false.

But faith calls no one a saint but him who is declared to be so by the judgment of God, for faith is not liable to be deceived. Therefore, although we ought all to be looked upon as saints by each other by the law of charity, yet no one ought to be decreed a saint by the law of faith so as to make it an article of faith that such or such in one is a saint. For in this way, that adversary of God, the Pope, canonized his minions whom he knows not to be saints, setting himself in the place of God.

2 Thessalonians 2.4 All that I say concerning those saints of yours, or rather ours, is this, that since they have spoken differently from each other, those should rather be selected who have

spoken the best, that is, who have spoken in the defense of grace and against free will, and those left who, through the infirmity of the flesh, have borne witness of the flesh rather than of the Spirit. And also that those who are inconsistent with themselves should be selected and caught at in those parts of their writings where they speak from the Spirit and left where they savor of the flesh. This is what becomes a Christian reader and a clean beast dividing the hoof and chewing the cud.

Leviticus 11.3 Deuteronomy 14.6 Whereas now, laying aside judgment, we swallow down all things together, or what is worse, by a perversion of judgment we cast away the best and receive the worst out of the same authors, and moreover affix to those worst parts the title and authority of their sanctity, which sanctity they obtained not on account of free will or flesh, but on account of the best things, even of the Spirit only. Section 34 But as you say, what therefore shall we do? The church is hidden, the saints are unknown. What and whom shall we believe? Or, as you most sharply dispute, who will certify us? How shall we search out the Spirit? If we look to erudition, all are rabbis.

If we look to life, all are sinners. If we look to the Scripture, they all claim it as belonging to them. But, however, our discussion is not so much concerning the Scripture, which is not itself sufficiently clear, but concerning the sense of the Scripture.

And though there are men of every order at hand, yet as neither numbers nor erudition nor dignity is of any service to the subject, much less can paucity, ignorance, and mean rank avail anything. Well, then, I suppose the matter must be left in doubt, and the point of dispute remain before the judge, so that we should seem to act with policy if we should go over to the sentiments of the skeptics. Unless, indeed, we were to act as you wisely do, for you pretend that you are so much in doubt that you professedly desire to seek and learn the truth, while at the same time you cleave to those who assert free will until the truth be made glaringly manifest.

But, no, I here in reply to you observe that you neither say all nor nothing, for we shall not search out the spirit by the arguments of erudition, of life, of talent, of multitude, of dignity, of ignorance, of inexperience, of paucity, or of meanness of rank. And yet I do not approve of those whose sole resource is in boasting of the spirit. For I had the last year and still have a sharp warfare with those fanatics who subject the scriptures to the interpretation of their own boasted spirit.

On the same account, also, I have hitherto determinately set myself against the Pope in whose kingdom nothing is more common or more generally received than this saying that the scriptures are obscure and ambiguous, and that the spirit as the interpreter should be sought from the apostolical sea of Rome, than which nothing could be said that was more destructive. For by means of this saying, a set of impious men have exalted themselves above the scriptures themselves, and by the same have done whatever pleased them, till at length the scriptures are absolutely trodden underfoot, and we, compelled to believe and teach nothing but the dreams of men that are mad. In a word, that saying is no human invention, but a poison poured forth into the world by a wonderful malice of the devil himself, the prince of all demons.

We hold the case thus, that the spirits are to be tried and proved by a twofold judgment, the one internal, by which, through the Holy Spirit or a peculiar gift of God, anyone may illustrate, and to a certainty judge of and determine on the doctrines and sentiments of all men for himself and his own personal salvation, concerning which it is said, 1 Corinthians 2.15, The spiritual man judgeth

all things, but he himself is judged of no man. This belongs to faith, and is necessary for every, even private Christian. This we have called above the internal clearness of the Holy Scripture, and it was this, perhaps, to which they alluded, who, in answer to you, said that all things must be determined by the judgment of the Spirit.

But this judgment cannot profit another, nor are we speaking of this judgment in our present discussion, for no one, I think, doubts its reality. The other, then, is the external judgment, by which we judge to the greatest certainty of the spirits and doctrines of all men, not for ourselves only, but for others also, and for their salvation. This judgment is peculiar to the public ministry of the Word and the external office, and especially belongs to teachers and preachers of the Word.

Of this we make use when we strengthen the weak in faith, and when we refute adversaries. This is what we before called the external clearness of the Holy Scripture. Hence we affirm that all spirits are to be proved in the face of the Church by the judgment of Scripture, for this ought, above all things, to be received and most firmly settled among Christians, that the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light by far more clear than the sun itself, especially in those things which pertain unto salvation or necessity.

Section 35 But since we have been persuaded to the contrary of this by that pestilent saying of the sophists the Scriptures are obscure and ambiguous, we are compelled, first of all, to prove that first grand principle of ours, by which all other things are to be proved, which, among the sophists, is considered absurd and impossible to be done. First, then, Moses saith Deuteronomy 17, 8 that if there arise a matter too hard in judgment men are to go to the place which God shall choose for his name and there to consult the priests who are to judge of it according to the law of the Lord. He saith, according to the law of the Lord.

But how will they judge thus if the law of the Lord be not externally most clear so as to satisfy them concerning it? Otherwise, it would have been sufficient if he had said according to their own spirit. Nay, it is so in every government of the people. The causes of all are adjusted according to laws.

But how could they be adjusted if the laws were not most certain and absolutely very lights to the people? But if the laws were ambiguous and uncertain there would not only be no clauses settled but no certain consistency of manners. Since, therefore, laws are enacted that manners may be regulated according to a certain form and questions and causes settled it is necessary that that which is to be the rule and standard for men in their dealings with each other as the law is should of all things be the most certain and most clear. And if that light and certainty in laws in profane administrations where temporal things only are concerned are necessary and have been by the goodness of God freely granted to the whole world how shall he not have given to Christians that is to his own elect laws and rules of much greater light and certainty according to which they might adjust and settle both themselves and all their causes and that more especially since he wills that all temporal things should by his be despised and if God so clothed the grass of the field which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven how much more shall he clothe us? Matthew 6 30 But let us proceed and drown that pestilence saying of the sophists in scriptures Psalm 19 8 saith the commandment of the Lord is clear or pure enlightening the eyes and surely that which enlightens the eyes cannot be obscure or ambiguous again Psalm 119 130 the door of thy words giveth light it giveth understanding to the simple here it is ascribed unto the words of God that they are a door and something open which is quite plain to all and enlightens even the simple Isaiah 8 20 sends all

questions to the law and to the testimony and threatens that if we do not do this the light of the east shall be denied us in Malachi 2 7 commands that they should seek the law from the mouth of the priest as being the messenger of the Lord of hosts but a most excellent messenger indeed of the Lord of hosts he must be who should bring forth those things which were both so ambiguous to himself and so obscure to the people that neither he should know what he said himself nor they what they heard and what throughout the Old Testament in the 119th Psalm especially is more frequently said in praise of the scripture than that it is itself a most certain and most clear light for Psalm 119 105 celebrates its clearness thus thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my paths he does not say only thy spirit is a lamp unto my feet though he ascribed them to him also his office saying thy good spirit shall lead me into the land of uprightness Psalm 143 10 thus the scripture is called a way and a path that is from its most perfect certainty section 36 now let us come to the New Testament Paul saith Romans 1 2 that the gospel was promised by the prophets in the holy scriptures and Romans 3 21 that the righteousness of faith was testified by the law and the prophets but what testimony is that if it is obscure Paul however throughout all his epistles makes the gospel the word of light the gospel of clearness and he professedly and most copiously sets it forth as being so 2 Corinthians 3 4 where he treats most gloriously concerning the clearness both of Moses and of Christ Peter also saith 2 Peter 1 19 and we certainly have more surely the word of prophecy unto which ye do well that ye take heed as into a light shining in a dark place here Peter makes the word of God a clear lamp and all other things darkness whereas we make obscurity in darkness of the word Christ also often calls himself the light of the world John 8 12 9 5 and John the Baptist a burning and shining light John 5 35 certainly not on account of the holiness of his life but on account of the word which he ministered in the same manner Paul calls the Philippians shining lights of the world Philippians 2 15 because says he ye hold forth the word of life 16 for life without the word is uncertain and obscure and what is the design of the apostles in proving their preaching by the scriptures is it that they may obscure their own darkness by still greater darkness what was the intention of Christ in teaching the Jews to search the scriptures John 5 39 as testifying of him was it that he might render them doubtful concerning faith in him what was their intention who having heard Paul searched the scriptures night and day to see if these things were so Acts 17 11 do not all these things prove that the apostles as well as Christ himself appealed to the scriptures as the most clear testimonies of the truth of their discourses with what face then do we make them obscure are these words of the scripture I pray you obscure or ambiguous God created the heavens and the earth Genesis 1 1 the word was made flesh John 1 14 and all those other words which the whole world receives as articles of faith whence then did they receive them was it not from the scriptures and what do those who at this day preach do they not expound and declare the scriptures but if the scripture which they declare be obscure who shall certify us that their declaration is to be dependent on shall it be certified by another new declaration but who shall make that declaration and so we may go on ad infinitum in a word if the scripture be obscure or ambiguous what need was there for its being sent down from heaven are we not obscure and ambiguous enough in ourselves without an increase of it by obscurity ambiguity and darkness being sent down unto us from heaven and if this be the case what will become of that of the apostle all scripture is given by inspiration of god and is profitable for doctrine for reproof for correction 2nd timothy 3 16 Nay Paul thou art altogether useless and all those things which thou ascribest unto scripture are to be sought for out of the fathers approved by a long course of ages and from the roman sea wherefore thy sentiment must be revoked where

thou writest to Titus chapter 1 9 that a bishop ought to be powerful in doctrine to exhort and to convince the gainsayers and to stop the mouths of vain talkers and deceivers of minds for how shall he be powerful when thou leavest him the scriptures in obscurity that is as arms of tow and feeble straws instead of a sword and christ must also of necessity revoke his word where he falsely promises us saying i will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist luke 21 15 for how shall they not resist when we fight against them with obscurities and uncertainties and why do you also erasmus prescribe to us a form of christianity if the scriptures be obscure to you but i fear i must already be burdensome even to the insensible by dwelling so long and spending so much strength upon a point so fully clear but it was necessary that that impudent and blasphemous saying the scriptures are obscure should thus be drowned and you too my friend erasmus know very well what you are saying when you deny that the scripture is clear for you at the same time drop into my ear this assertion it of necessity follows therefore that all your saints whom you adduce are much less clear and truly it would be so for who shall certify us concerning their light if you make the scriptures obscure therefore they who deny the all clearness and all plainness of the scriptures leave us nothing else but darkness but here perhaps you will say all that you have advanced is nothing to me i do not say that the scriptures are everywhere obscure for who would be so mad but that they are obscure in this and the like parts i answer i do not advance these things against you only but against all who are of the same sentiments with you moreover i declare against you concerning the whole of the scripture that i will have no one part of it called obscure and to support me stands that which i have brought forth out of peter that the word of god is to us a lamp shining in a dark place 2nd peter 1 19 but if any part of this lamp do not shine it is rather a part of the dark place than of the lamp itself for christ has not so illuminated us as to wish that any part of his word should remain obscure even while he commands us to attend to it for if it be not shiningly plain his command to us to attend to it is in vain wherefore if the doctrine concerning free will be obscure and ambiguous it does not belong to christians and the scriptures and is therefore to be left alone entirely and classed among those old wives fables 1st timothy 4 7 which paul condemns in contentious christians but if it do belong unto christians and the scriptures it ought to be clear open and manifest and in every respect likened to all the other most evident articles of faith for all the articles of faith which belong unto christians ought to be such as may not only be most evident to themselves but so defended by manifest and clear scriptures against the adversaries as to stop the mouths of them all that they shall not be able in anything to gainsay and this christ has promised us saying i will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist but if our mouth be weak in this part that the adversaries are able to resist his saying that no adversary shall be able to resist our mouth is false in the doctrine of free will therefore we shall either have no adversaries which will be the case if it belong not unto us or if it belong unto us we shall have adversaries indeed but such as will not be able to resist but concerning the inability of our adversaries to resist as that particular falls in here i would by the way observe that it is thus it does not mean that they are forced to yield with the heart or to confess or be silent for who can compel men against their will to yield confess their error and be silent what saith augustine is more loquacious than vanity but what is meant by their mouths being stopped they're not having a word to gainsay and they're saying many things and yet in the judgment of common sense saying nothing will be best illustrated by examples when christ put the sadducees to silence by proving the resurrection from the dead out of that scripture of moses matthew 22 23 through 32 i am the god of abraham and so

forth god is not the god of the dead but of the living exodus 3 6 this they were not able to resist nor had they a word to gainsay but did they therefore cease from their opinion and how often did he by the most evident scriptures and arguments so confute the pharisees that the very people saw them to be confuted openly and they themselves felt it nevertheless they still perseveringly continued his adversaries stephen acts 6 10 so spoke that according to the testimony of luke they could not resist the spirit and the wisdom with which he spake but what did they did they yield no from their shame of being overcome and their inability to resist they became furious and shutting their eyes and ears they suborn false witnesses against him acts 6 11 through 13 behold how the same apostle standing in the council confutes his adversaries while he enumerates to that people the mercies of god unto them from their beginning and proves to them that god never commanded a temple to be built unto him for it was upon that point that they held him as guilty and that was the subject in dispute at length however he grants that there was a temple built under solomon but then he takes up the point in this way but the most high dwelleth not in temples made with hands and to prove this he brings forward isaiah the prophet 64 1 what is the house that ye build unto me and tell me what could they hear say against the scripture so manifest yet still not at all moved by it they stood fixed in their own opinion wherefore he then launches forth on them saying ye uncircumcised in heart and ears ye do always resist the holy ghost and so forth acts 7 51 he sayeth ye do resist although they were not able to resist but let us come to our own times john hoss preached thus against the pope from matthew 16 18 the gates of hell shall not prevail against my church is there there any obscurity or ambiguity but the gates of hell do prevail against the pope and his for they are notorious throughout the world of their open impiety and iniquities is there any obscurity here either ergo the pope and his are not the church concerning which christ speaks what could they gain say here how could they resist the mouth that christ had given him yet they did resist and persist until they had burnt him so far were they from yielding to him in heart and this is the kind of resistance to which christ alludes when he saith your adversaries shall not be able to resist luke 21 15 he says they are adversaries therefore they will resist for otherwise they would not remain adversaries but would become friends and yet he says they shall not be able to resist what is this else but saying though they resist they shall not be able to resist if therefore i also shall be enabled so to refute the doctrine of free will that the adversaries shall not be able to resist although they persist in their opinion and go on to resist contrary to their conscience i shall have done enough for i well know by experience how unwilling everyone is to be overcome and as quintillion says that there is no one who would not rather appear to know than to be taught although nowadays all men in all places have this proverb on their tongue but more from use or rather abuse than from heart reality i am willing to learn and am willing to follow what is better when i am taught it by admonition i am a man and liable to err because under this mask this fair semblance of humility they can with plausible confidence say i am not fully satisfied of it i do not comprehend it he does violence to the scriptures he asserts so obstinately and they nestle under this confidence taking it for granted that no one would ever suspect that souls of so much humility could ever pertinaciously resist and determinately impugn the known truth hence their not yielding in heart is not to be imputed to their malice but to the obscurity and duplicity of their arguments in the same manner did the philosophers of the greeks act who that one might not appear to give up to the other though evidently confuted began as aristotle records to deny first principles in the same way we would mildly persuade ourselves and others that there are in the world many good men who would willingly embrace the truth if there were but one who could

plainly show which it is and that it is not to be supposed that so many learned men in such a course of ages were all in error and did not know the truth as though we knew not that the world is the kingdom of satan where in addition to the natural blindness that is engendered in our flesh and those most wicked spirits also which have dominion over us we grow hardened in that very blindness and are bound in a darkness no longer human but devilish section 38 but you ask if then the scripture be quite clear why have men of renowned talent through so many ages been blind upon this point i answer they have been thus blind to the praise and glory of free will in order that that highly boasted of power by which a man is able to apply himself unto those things that pertain unto eternal salvation might be eminently displayed that very exalted power which neither sees those things which it sees nor hears those things which it hears and much less understands and seeks after them for to this power applies that which christ and the evangelists so often bring forward out of isaiah 6 9 hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive what is this else but saying that free will or the human heart is so bound by the power of satan that unless it be quickened up in a wonderful way by the spirit of god it cannot have itself see or hear those things which strike against the eyes and ears so manifestly as to be as it were palpable by the hand so great is the misery and blindness of the human race thus also the evangelists themselves when they wondered how it could be that the jews were not won over by the works and words of christ which were evidently incontrovertible and undeniable satisfied themselves from that place of the scripture where it is shown that man left to himself seeing seeth not and hearing heareth not and what can be more monstrous the light saith christ shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not John 1 5 who could believe this who hath heard the like that the light should shine in darkness and yet the darkness still remain darkness and not be enlightened wherefore it is no wonder in divine things that through so many ages men renowned for talent remain blind it might have been a wonder in human things but in divine things it would rather have been a wonder if there had been one here and there that did not remain blind that they all remained utterly blind alike is no wonder at all for what is the whole human race together without the spirit but the kingdom of the devil as i have said and a confused chaos of darkness and therefore it is that paul ephesians 6 12 calls the devils the rulers of this darkness and first corinthians 2 8 he saith that none of the princes of this world knew the wisdom of god what then must he think of the rest who assert that the princes of this world are the slaves of darkness for by princes he means those greatest and highest ones whom you call men renowned for talent and why were all the arians blind were there not among them men renowned for talent why was christ's foolishness to the nations are there not among the nations men renowned for talent god saith paul knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain first corinthians 3 20 he chose not to say of men as the text to which he refers has it but would point to the first and greatest among men that from them we might form a judgment of the rest but upon these points more at large perhaps hereafter suffice it thus to have premised in exhortium that the scriptures are most clear and that by them our doctrines can be so defended that the adversaries cannot resist but those doctrines that cannot be thus defended are nothing to us for they belong not unto christians but if there be any who do not see this clearness and are blind or offended unto this son they if they be wicked manifest how great that dominion and power of satan is over the sons of men when they can neither hear nor comprehend the all clear words of god but are as one cheated by a juggler who is made to think that the sun is a cold cinder or to believe that a stone is gold but if they fear god they are to be numbered among those elect who to a certain degree are

led into error that the power of god may be manifest in us without which we can neither see nor do anything whatever for the not comprehending the words of god does not arise as you pretend from weakness of mind nay nothing is better adapted to the receiving of the words of god than a weakness of the mind for it was on account of these weak ones and to these weak ones that christ came and it is to them he sends his word but it is the wickedness of satan enthroned and reigning in our weakness and resisting the word of god for if satan did not do this a whole world of men might be converted by one word of god once heard nor could there be need of more section 39 but why do i go on enlarging why do i not conclude this discussion with this exhortium and give my sentence against you in your own words according to that saying of christ by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned matthew 12 37 for you say that the scripture is not quite clear upon this point and then suspending all declaration of your own sentiment you discuss each side of the subject what may be said for and what against and nothing else whatever do you do in the whole of this book of yours which for that very reason you wished to call diatribe the collation rather than apophysis the denial or something of that kind because you wrote with the design to collect all things and to assert nothing but if the scripture be not quite clear upon this point why do those of whom you boast not only remain blind to their side of the subject but rashly and as fools define and assert free will as though proved by a certain and all sure testimony of scripture that numberless series of the most learned men i mean whom the consent of so many ages has approved even unto this day and many of whom in addition to an admirable acquaintance with the sacred writings a piety of life commands some have given by their blood a testimony of that doctrine of christ which they have defended by scriptures if you say what you say from your heart it is surely a settled point with you that free will has asserters who are endowed with a wonderful understanding in the sacred writings and who even gave testimony of that doctrine by their blood if this be true they certainly had clear scripture on their side else where would be their admirable understanding in the sacred writings moreover what lightness and temerity of spirit must it be to shed one's blood for a matter uncertain and obscure this is not to be the martyrs of christ but the martyrs of devils now then do you just set the matter before you and weigh it in your mind and say to which of the two you consider the greatest credit should be given to the prejudices of so many learned men so many orthodox divines so many saints so many martyrs so many theologians old and recent so many colleges so many councils so many bishops and high priest popes who were of opinion that the scriptures are quite clear and who according to you confirmed the same by their writings and by their blood or to your own private judgment who deny that the scriptures are quite clear and who perhaps never spent one single tear or sigh for the doctrine of christ in the whole of your life if you believe they were right in their opinion why do you not follow them in it if you do not believe they were right why do you boast of them with such a trumpeting mouth and such a torrent of language as though you would overwhelm us head and ears with a certain storm or flood of eloquence which flood however will the more heavily rush back upon your own head whilst my ark is borne along in safety on the top of the waters moreover you attribute to so many and great men the utmost folly and temerity for when you speak of them as being men of the greatest understanding in the scripture and as having asserted it by their pen by their life and by their death and yet at the same time contend yourself that the same scripture is obscure and ambiguous this is nothing less than making those men most ignorant in understanding and most stupid in assertion thus i their poor private despiser do not pay them such an ill compliment as you do their public flatterer section 40 here therefore i hold you fast in a last

pinch syllogism as you say for either the one or the other of your assertions must be false either that where you say those men were admirable for their understanding in the sacred writings for their life and for their martyrdom or that where you say that the scriptures are not quite clear but since you are drawn more this latter way that is to believe that the scriptures are not quite clear for this is what you harp upon throughout the whole of your book it remains evident that it was either from your own natural inclination towards them or for the sake of flattering them but by no means from seriousness that you called those men men of the greatest understanding in the scripture and martyrs of christ merely that you might blind the eyes of the inexperienced commonalty and make work for luther by loading his cause with empty words odium and contempt but however i aver that neither of your assertions are true and that both are false for first of all i aver that the scriptures are quite clear and next that those men as far as they asserted free will were most ignorant of the sacred writings and moreover that they neither asserted it by their life nor by their death but by their pen only and that while their heart was traveling another road wherefore this small part of the disputation i conclude thus by the scripture as being obscure nothing ever has hitherto nor ever can be defined concerning free will according to your own testimony moreover nothing has ever been manifested in confirmation of free will in the lives of all men from the beginning of the world as we have proved above to teach then a something which is neither described by one word within the scriptures nor evidenced by one fact without the scriptures is that which does not belong to the doctrines of christians but to the very fables of lucian except however that lucian as he amuses only with ludicrous stories from wit and policy deceives and injures no one but these friends of ours in a matter of importance which concerns eternal salvation madly trifle to the perdition of souls innumerable thus i might here have concluded the whole of this discussion even with the testimony of my adversaries making for me and against themselves for no proof can be more decisive than the very confession and testimony of the guilty person against himself but however as paul commands us to stop the mouths of vain talkers let us now enter upon the discussion itself and handle the subject in the order in which the diatribe proceeds that we may first confute the arguments seduced in support of free will secondly defend our arguments that are confuted and lastly contend for the grace of god against free will end of section 40

## 05 - Sections 41-58: Discussion, Part I-a

---

Sections 41 through 58 of the *Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther, translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain. Discussion, first part.

Section 41. And first of all, let us begin regularly with your definition, according to which you define free will thus. Moreover, I consider free will in this light, that it is a power in the human will by which a man may apply himself to those things which lead unto eternal salvation, or turn away from the same.

With a great deal of policy, indeed, you have here stated a mere naked definition, without declaring any part of it, as all others do. Because, perhaps, you feared more shipwrecks than one. I, therefore, am compelled to state the several parts myself.

The thing defined itself, if it be closely examined, has a much wider extent than the definition of it. And such a definition the sophists would call faulty. That is, when the definition does not fully embrace the thing defined.

For I have shown before that free will cannot be applied to anyone but to God only. He may perhaps rightly assign to man some kind of will, but to assign unto him free will in divine things is going too far. For the term free will, in the judgment of the ears of all, means that which can and does do Godward whatever it pleases, restrainable by no law and no command.

But you cannot call him free who is a servant acting under the power of the Lord. How much less, then, can we rightly call men or angels free, who so live under the all-overruling command of God, to say nothing of sin and death? That they cannot consist one moment by their own power. Here, then, at the outset, the definition of the term and the definition of the thing termed militate against each other.

Because the term signifies one thing, and the thing termed is by experience found to be another. It would indeed be more properly termed vertible will, or mutable will. For in this way Augustine and after him the sophists diminished the glory and force of the term free, adding thereby this detriment, that they assign vertibility to free will.

And it becomes us thus to speak, lest by inflated and lofty terms of empty sound we should deceive the hearts of men. And, as Augustine also thinks, we ought to speak according to a certain rule in sober and proper words. For in teaching simplicity and propriety of argumentation is required, and not high-flown figures of rhetorical persuasion.

Section 42 But that we might not seem to delight in a mere war of words, we cede to that abuse, although great and dangerous, that free will means vertible will. We will cede also that to Erasmus where he makes free will a power of the human will, as though angels had not a free will too, merely because he designed in this book to treat only on the free will of men. We make this remark, otherwise even in this part the definition would be too narrow to embrace the thing defined.

We come then to those parts of the definition which are the hinge upon which the matter turns. Of these things some are manifest enough, the rest shun the light, as if conscious to themselves that they had everything to fear. Because nothing ought to be expressed more clearly and more decisively than a definition.

For to define obscurely is the same thing as defining nothing at all. The clear parts of the definition are these, power of human will, and by which a man can, also unto eternal salvation. But these things are undebatae, to apply, and to those things which lead, also to turn away.

What shall we divine that this to apply means, and this to turn away also? And also what these words mean, which pertain unto eternal salvation. Into what dark corner have these withdrawn their meaning? I seem as if I were engaged in dispute with a very Scotinian, or with Heraclitus himself, so as to be in the way of being worn out by a two-fold labor, first that I shall have to find out my adversary by groping and feeling about for him in pits and darkness, which is an enterprise both venturous and perilous, and if I do not find him, to fight to no purpose with ghosts, and beat the air in the dark. And secondly, if I should bring him out into the light, that then I shall have to fight with him upon equal ground, when I am already worn out with hunting after him.

I suppose then, what you mean by the power of the human will, is this, a power, or faculty, or disposition, or aptitude, to will or not to will, to choose or refuse, to approve or disapprove, and what other actions soever belong to the will? Now then, what it is for this same power to apply itself, or to turn away, I do not see, unless it be the very willing or not willing, choosing or refusing, approving or disapproving, that is, the very action itself of the will. But may we suppose that this power is a kind of medium between the will itself and the action itself? Such as, that by which the will itself allures forth the action itself of willing or not willing, or by which the action itself of willing or not willing is allured forth? Anything else beside this, it is impossible for one to imagine or think of. And if I am deceived, let the fault be my authors, who has given the definition, not mine who examine it.

For it is justly said among lawyers, his words who speaks obscurely when he can speak more plainly, are to be interpreted against himself. And here I wish to know nothing of our moderns and their subtleties, for we must come plainly to close quarters in what we say, for the sake of understanding and teaching. And as to those words, which lead unto eternal salvation, I suppose by them are meant the words and works of God, which are offered to the human will, that it might either apply itself to them or turn away from them.

But I call both the law and the gospel the words of God. By the law works are required, and by the gospel faith. For there are no other things which lead either unto the grace of God or unto eternal salvation, but the word and the work of God, because grace or the spirit is the life itself, to which we are led by the word and work of God.

But this life or salvation is an eternal matter, incomprehensible to the human capacity, as Paul shows out of Isaiah, 1 Corinthians 2.9, I hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. For when we speak of eternal life, we speak of that which is numbered among the chiefest articles of our faith, and what free will avails in this article Paul testifies, 1 Corinthians 2.10. Also, God, saith he, hath revealed them unto us by his spirit, as though he had said, the heart of no man will ever

understand or think of any of those things unless the spirit shall reveal them. So far is it from possibility that he should ever apply himself unto them or seek after them.

Look at experience. What have the most exalted minds among the nations thought of a future life and of the resurrection? Has it not been that the more exalted they were in mind, the more ridiculous the resurrection and eternal life have appeared to them? Unless you mean to say that those philosophers and Greeks at Athens, who, Acts 17.18, called Paul as he taught these things, a babbler and a setter forth of strange gods, were not of exalted minds. Porcius Festus, Acts 26.24, calls out that Paul is mad on account of his preaching eternal life.

What does Pliny bark forth, Book 7? What does Lucian also, that mighty genius? Were not they men wondered at? Moreover, to this day there are many, who, the more renowned they are for talent and erudition, the more they laugh at this article, and that openly, considering it a mere fable. And certainly no man upon earth, unless imbued with the Holy Spirit, ever secretly knows or believes in or wishes for eternal salvation, how much soever he may boast of it by his voice and by his pen. And may you and I, friend Erasmus, be free from this boasting leaven.

So rare is a believing soul in this article. Have I got the sense of this definition? Section 44. Upon the authority of Erasmus, then, free will is a power of the human will, which can of itself will and not will to embrace the word and work of God, by which it is to be led to those things which are beyond its capacity and comprehension.

If, then, it can will and not will, it can also love and hate. And if it can love and hate, it can to a certain degree do the law and believe the gospel. For it is impossible, if you can will and not will, that you should not be able by that will to begin some kind of work, even though from the hindering of another you should not be able to perfect it.

And therefore, as among the works of God which lead to salvation, death, the cross, and all the evils of the world are numbered, human will can will its own death and perdition. Nay, it can will all things, while it can will the embracing of the word and work of God. For what is there that can be anywhere beneath, above, within or without the word and work of God but God himself? And what is there here left to grace and the Holy Spirit? This is plainly to ascribe divinity to free will.

For to will to embrace the law and the gospel, not to will sin. And to will death belongs to the power of God alone, as Paul testifies in more places than one. Wherefore no one since the Pelagians has written more rightly concerning free will than Erasmus.

For I have said above that free will is a divine term and signifies a divine power. But no one hitherto, except the Pelagians, have ever assigned to it that power. Hence Erasmus by far outstrips the Pelagians themselves.

For they assign that divinity to the whole of free will, but Erasmus to the half of it only. They divide free will into two parts, the power of discerning and the power of choosing, assigning the one to reason and the other to will. And the sophists do the same.

But Erasmus, setting aside the power of discerning, exalts the power of choosing alone, and thus makes a lame half-membered free will God himself. What must we suppose that he would have done had he set about describing the whole of free will? But not contented with this, he outstrips even the philosophers. For it has never yet been settled among them whether or not anything can

give motion to itself.

And upon this point the Platonics and Peripatetics are divided in the whole body of philosophy. But according to Erasmus, free will, not only of its own power gives motion to itself, but applies itself to those things which are eternal, that is, which are incomprehensible to itself. A new and unheard of definer of free will truly, who leaves the philosophers, the Pelagians, the sophists, and all the rest of them far behind him.

Nor is this all. He does not even spare himself, but descends from and militates against himself more than against all the rest together. For he had said before that the human will is utterly ineffective without grace, unless perhaps this was said only in joke.

But here, where he gives a serious definition, he says that the human will has that power by which it can effectively apply itself to those things which pertain unto eternal salvation, that is, which are incomparably beyond that power. So that in this part Erasmus outstrips even himself. Section 45 Do you see, friend Erasmus, that by this definition you, though unwittingly I presume, betray yourself, and make it manifest that you either know nothing of these things whatever, or that without any consideration, and in a mere air of contempt, you write upon the subject, not knowing what you say, nor whereof you affirm? And as I said before, you say less about, and attribute more to free will than all others put together.

For you do not describe the whole of free will, and yet you assign unto it all things. The opinion of the sophists, or at least of the father of them, Peter Lombard, is far more tolerable. He says free will is the faculty of discerning, and then choosing also, good, if with grace, but evil, if grace be wanting.

He plainly agrees in sentiment with Augustine, that free will of its own power cannot do anything but fall, nor avail unto anything but to sin. Wherefore Augustine also, Book II, against Julian, calls free will under-bondage rather than free. But you make the power of free will equal in both respects, that it can by its own power without grace, both apply itself unto good, and turn itself from evil.

For you do not imagine how much you assign unto it by this pronoun itself, and by itself, when you say can apply itself. For you utterly exclude the Holy Spirit with all his power, as a thing superfluous and unnecessary. Your definition therefore is condemnable even by the sophists, who, were they not so blinded by hatred and fury against me, would be enraged at your book rather than at mine.

But now, as your intent is to oppose Luther, all that you say is holy and Catholic, even though you speak against both yourself and them. So great is the patience of holy men. Not that I say this as approving the sentiments of the sophists concerning free will, but because I consider them more tolerable, for they approach nearer to the truth.

For though they do not say, as I do, that free will is nothing at all, yet, since they say that it can of itself do nothing without grace, they militate against Erasmus, nay, they seem to militate against themselves, and to be tossed to and fro in a mere quarrel of words, being more earnest for contention than for the truth, which is just as sophists should be. But now, let us suppose that a sophist of no mean rank were brought before me, with whom I could speak upon these things

apart in familiar conversation, and should ask him for his liberal and candid judgment in this way. If anyone should tell you that that was free, which of its own power could only go one way, that is, the bad way, and which could go the other way, indeed, that is, the right way, but not by its own power, nay, only by the help of another, could you refrain from laughing in his face, my friend? For in this way I will make it appear that a stone or a log of wood has free will, because it can go upwards and downwards, although by its own power it can go only downwards, but can go upwards only by the help of another.

And, as I said before, by meaning at the same time the thing itself, and also something else which may be joined with it or added to it, I will say consistently, with the use of all words and languages, all men are no man, and all things are nothing. Thus, by multiplicity of argumentation, they at last make free will free by accident, as being that which may at some time be set free by another. But our point in dispute is concerning the thing itself, concerning the reality of free will.

If this be what is to be solved, there now remains nothing, let them say what they will, but the empty name of free will. The sophists are deficient also in this. They assign to free will the power of discerning good from evil.

Moreover, they set light by regeneration and the renewing of the spirit, and give that other external aid, as it were, to free will. But of this hereafter. Let this be sufficient concerning the definition.

Now let us look into the arguments that are to exalt this empty thing of a term. Section 46. First of all, we have that of Ecclesiasticus 15, 15 through 18.

God from the beginning made man, and left him in the hand of his own counsel. He gave him also his commandments, and his precepts, saying, If thou wilt keep my commandments, and wilt keep continually the faith that pleaseth me, they shall preserve thee. He hath set before thee fire and water, and upon which thou wilt stretch forth thine hand, before man is life and death, good and evil, and whichsoever pleaseth him shall be given unto him.

Although I might justly refuse this book, yet nevertheless I receive it, lest I should, with loss of time, involve myself in a dispute concerning the books that are received into the canon of the Hebrews, which canon you do not a little reproach and deride, when you compare the Proverbs of Solomon and the Love Song, as with a double-meaning sneer you call it, with the two books Esdras and Judith, the history of Susanna, of the dragon, and the book of Esther, though they have this last in their canon, and according to my judgment it is much more worthy of being there than any one of those that are considered not to be in the canon. But I would briefly answer you here in your own words. The scripture in this place is obscure and ambiguous, therefore it proves nothing to a certainty.

But, however, since I stand in the negative, I call upon you to produce that place which declares in plain words what free will is and what it can do. And this perhaps you will do by about the time of the Greek chalice. In order to avoid this necessity you spend many fine sayings upon nothing, and moving along on the tiptoe of prudence, cite numberless opinions concerning free will, and make of Pelagius almost an evangelist.

Moreover, you vamp us of fourfold grace, so as to assign a sort of faith and charity even to the philosophers. And also that new fable, a threefold law, of nature, of works, and of faith, so as to

assert with all boldness that the precepts of the philosophers agree with the precepts of the gospel. Again, you apply that of Psalm 4.6, the light of thy countenance is settled upon us, which speaks of the knowledge of the very countenance of the Lord, that is of faith, to blinded reason.

All which things together, if taken into consideration by any Christian, must compel him to suspect that you are mocking and deriding the doctrines and religion of Christians. For to attribute these things as so much ignorance to him who has illustrated all our doctrines with so much diligence, and stored them up in memory, appears to me very difficult indeed. But however, I will here abstain from open exposure, contented to wait until a more favorable opportunity shall offer itself.

Although I entreat you, friend Erasmus, not to tempt me in this way like one of those who say, who sees us? For it is by no means safe, in so great a matter, to be continually mocking everyone with vertumbities of words. But to the subject. Section 47.

Out of the one opinion concerning free will, you make three. You say that the first opinion, of those who deny that man can will good without special grace, who deny that it can begin, who deny that it can make progress, perfect, and so forth, seems to you severe, though it may be very probable. And this you prove as leaving to man the desire and the effort, but not leaving what is to be ascribed to his own power.

That the second opinion, of those who contend that free will avails unto nothing but to sin, and that grace alone works good in us, and so forth, is more severe still. And thirdly, that the opinion of those who say that free will is an empty term, for that God works in us both good and evil, is most severe, and that it is against these last that you profess to write. Do you know what you are saying, friend Erasmus? You are here making three different opinions as if belonging to three different sects, because you do not know that it is the same subject handled by us same professors of the same sect, only by different persons, in a different way, and in other words.

But let me just put you in remembrance, and set before you the yawning inconsiderateness or stupidity of your judgment. How does that definition of free will, let me ask you, which you gave us above, square with this first opinion, which you profess to be, very probable? For you said that free will is a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself unto good, whereas here you say and prove the same, that man without grace cannot will good. The definition, therefore, affirms what its example denies, and hence there are found in your free will both a yea and a nay, so that in one and the same doctrine and article you approve and condemn us, and approve and condemn yourself.

For do you think that to apply itself to those things which pertain unto eternal salvation, which power your definition assigns to free will, is not to do good, when, if there were so much good in free will, that it could apply itself unto good, it would have no need of grace? Therefore the free will which you define is one, and the free will you defend is another. Hence, then, Erasmus, outstripping all others, has two free wills, and they militating against each other. But setting aside that free will which the definition defines, let us consider that which the opinion proposes is contrary to it.

You grant that man without special grace cannot will good, for we are not now discussing what the grace of God can do, but what man can do without grace. You grant, then, that free will cannot will good. This is nothing else but granting that it cannot apply itself to those things which pertain unto

eternal salvation, according to the tune of your definition.

Nay, you say a little before that the human will after sin is so depraved that, having lost its liberty, it is compelled to serve sin, and cannot recall itself into a better state. And if I am not mistaken, you make the Pelagians to be of this opinion. Now, then, I believe my Proteus has here no way of escape.

He is caught and held fast in plain words, that the will, having lost its liberty, is tied and bound a slave to sin. O noble free will, which, having lost its liberty, is declared by Erasmus himself to be the slave of sin. When Luther asserted this, nothing was ever heard of so absurd.

Nothing was more useless than that this paradox should be proclaimed abroad, so much so that even a diatribe must be written against him. But perhaps no one will believe me that these things are said by Erasmus. If the diatribe be read in this part, it will be admired.

But I do not so much admire it. For he who does not treat this as a serious subject, and is not interested in the cause, but is in mind alienated from it, and grows weary of it, cold in it, and disgusted with it, how shall not such an one everywhere speak absurdities, follies, and contrarities, while is one drunk or slumbering over the cause? He belches out in the midst of his snoring, it is so, it is not so, just as the different words sound against his ears. And therefore it is that rhetoricians require a feeling of the subject in the person discussing it, much more than does theology require such a feeling, that it may make the person vigilant, sharp, intent, prudent, and determined.

If therefore free will without grace, when it has lost its liberty, is compelled to serve sin, and cannot will good, I should be glad to know what that desire is, what that endeavor is, which that first probable opinion leaves it. It cannot be a good desire, or a good endeavor, because it cannot will good, as the opinion affirms, and as you grant. Therefore it is an evil desire, and an evil endeavor that is left, which, when the liberty is lost, is compelled to serve sin.

But above all, what, I pray, is the meaning of this saying, this opinion leaves the desire and the endeavor, but does not leave what is to be ascribed to its own power? Who can possibly conceive in his mind what this means? If the desire and the endeavor be left to the power of free will, how are they not ascribed to the same? If they be not ascribed to it, how can they be left to it? Are then that desire and that endeavor before grace, left to grace itself that comes after, and not to free will, so as to be at the same time left, and not left, to the same free will? If these things be not paradoxes, or rather enormities, then pray what are enormities? But perhaps the diatribe is dreaming this, that between these two, can will good, and cannot will good, there may be a medium, seeing that to will is absolute, both in respect of good and evil. So that thus, by a certain logical subtlety, we may steer clear of the rocks, and say, in the will of man there is a certain willing, which cannot indeed will good without grace, but which nevertheless, being without grace, does not immediately will nothing but evil, but is a sort of mere abstracted willing, vertible, upward unto good by grace, and downward unto evil by sin. But then, what will become of that which you have said, that when it has lost its liberty it is compelled to serve sin? What will become of that desire and endeavor which are left? Where will be that power of applying itself to those things which pertain unto eternal salvation? For that power of applying itself unto salvation cannot be a mere willing, unless the salvation itself be said to be nothing.

Nor again can that desire and endeavor be a mere willing, for desire must strive and attempt something, as good, perhaps, and cannot go forth into nothing, nor be absolutely inactive. In a word, which waysoever the diatribe turns itself, it cannot keep clear of inconsistencies and contradictory assertions, nor avoid making that very free will which it defends as much a bond-captive as it is a bond-captive itself, for in attempting to liberate free will, it is so entangled that it is bound together with free will in bonds indissoluble. Moreover, it is a mere logical figment, that in man there is a medium, a mere willing, nor can they who assert this prove it.

It arose from an ignorance of things and an observance of terms, as though the thing were always in reality as it is set forth in terms, and there are with the sophist many such misconceptions. Whereas the matter rather stands as Christ saith, He that is not with me is against me, Matthew 12, 30. He does not say, He that is not with me is yet not against me, but in the medium.

For if God be in us, Satan is from us, and it is present with us to will nothing but good. But if God be not in us, Satan is in us, and it is present with us to will evil only. Neither God nor Satan admit of a mere abstracted willing in us, but, as you yourself rightly say, when our liberty is lost we are compelled to serve sin.

That is, we will sin and evil, we speak sin and evil, we do sin and evil. Behold then, invincible in all powerful truth has driven the witless diatribe to that dilemma, and so turned its wisdom into foolishness, that whereas its design was to speak against me, it is compelled to speak for me, against itself, just in the same way as free will does anything good. For when it attempts so to do, the more it acts against evil, the more it acts against good, so that the diatribe is in saying exactly what free will is in doing.

Though the whole diatribe itself is nothing else but a notable effort of free will, condemning by defending, and defending by condemning, that is, being a twofold fool, while it would appear to be wise. This then is the state of the first opinion compared with itself. It denies that a man can will anything good, but yet that a desire remains, which desire, however, is not his own.

Section 50. Now let us compare this opinion with the remaining two. The next of these is that opinion more severe still, which holds that free will avails unto nothing but to sin.

And this, indeed, is Augustine's opinion, expressed as well in many other places, as more especially in his book concerning the spirit and the letter, in, if I mistake not, the fourth or fifth chapter, where he uses those very words. The third is that most severe opinion, that free will is a mere empty term, and that everything which we do is done from necessity under the bondage of sin. It is with these two that the diatribe conflicts.

I here observe that perhaps it may be that I am not able to discuss this point intelligibly, from not being sufficiently acquainted with the Latin or with the German. But I call God to witness, that I wish nothing else to be said or to be understood by the words of the last two opinions than what is said in the first opinion. Nor does Augustine wish anything else to be understood, nor do I understand anything else from his words than that which the first opinion asserts.

So that the three opinions brought forward by the diatribe are with me nothing else than my one sentiment. For when it is granted and established that free will, having once lost its liberty, is compulsively bound to the service of sin, and cannot will anything good, I from these words can

understand nothing else than that free will is a mere empty term, whose reality is lost. And a lost liberty, according to my grammar, is no liberty at all.

And to give the name of liberty to that which has no liberty is to give it an empty term. If I am wrong here, let him set me right who can. If these observations be obscure or ambiguous, let him who can illustrate and make them plain.

I, for my part, cannot call that health which is lost health. And if I were to ascribe it to one who was sick, I should think I was giving him nothing else than an empty name. But away with these enormities of words.

For who would bear such an abuse of the manner of speaking as that we should say a man has free will, and yet at the same time assert that when that liberty is once lost, he is compulsively bound to the service of sin, and cannot will anything good? These things are contrary to common sense, and utterly destroy the common manner of speaking. The diatribe is rather to be condemned, which in a drowsy way foists forth its own words without any regard to the words of others. It does not, I say, consider what it is, nor how much it is to assert that man, when his liberty is lost, is compelled to serve sin, and cannot will anything good.

For if it were at all vigilant or observant, it would plainly see that the sentiment contained in the three opinions is one and the same, which it makes to be diverse and contrary. For if a man, when he has lost his liberty, is compelled to serve sin, and cannot will good, what conclusion concerning him can there be more justly drawn, than that he can do nothing but sin, and will evil? And such a conclusion the sophists themselves would draw, even by their syllogisms. Wherefore the diatribe unhappily contends against the last two opinions, and approves the first, whereas that is precisely the same as the other two.

And thus again, as usual, it condemns itself, and approves my sentiments, in one and the same article. Let us now come to that passage in Ecclesiasticus, and also with it compare that first probable opinion. The opinion saith free will cannot will good.

The passage in Ecclesiasticus is adduced to prove that free will is something, and can do something. Therefore the opinion which is to be proved by Ecclesiasticus asserts one thing, and Ecclesiasticus which is adduced to prove it asserts another. This is just as if anyone, setting about to prove that Christ was the Messiah, would adduce a passage which proves that Pilate was governor of Syria, or anything else equally discordant.

It is in the same way that free will is here proved. But not to mention my having above made it manifest, that nothing clear or certain can be said or proved concerning free will, as to what it is, or what it can do, it is worthwhile to examine the whole passage thoroughly. First he saith, God made man in the beginning.

Here he speaks of the creation of man, nor does he say anything as yet concerning either free will or the commandments. Then he goes on, and left him in the hand of his own counsel. And what is here? Is free will built upon this? But there is not here any mention of commandments, for the doing of which free will is required.

Nor do we read anything of this kind in the creation of man. If anything be understood by the hand of his own counsel, that should rather be understood which is in Genesis 1 and 2, that man was

made Lord of all things, that he might freely exercise dominion over them. And as Moses saith, let us make man, and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea.

Nor can anything else be proved from these words. For it is in these things only that man may act of his own will, as being subject unto him. And moreover, he calls this man's counsel, in contradiction as it were to the counsel of God.

But after this, when he has said that man was made and left thus in the hand of his own counsel, he adds, he added moreover his commandments and his precepts. Unto what did he add them? Certainly unto that counsel and will of man, and over and above unto that constituting of his dominion over other things. By which commandments he took from man the dominion over one part of his creatures, that is over the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and willed rather that he should not be free.

Having added the commandments, he then comes to the will of man towards God, and towards the things of God. If thou wilt keep the commandments, they shall preserve thee, and so forth. From this part, therefore, if thou wilt, begins the question concerning free will.

So that from Ecclesiasticus we learn that man is constituted as divided into two kingdoms. The one is that in which he is led according to his own will and counsel, without the precepts and the commandments of God. That is, in those things which are beneath him.

Here he has dominion, and his Lord, as left in the hand of his own counsel. Not that God so leaves him to himself, as that he does not cooperate with him, but he commits unto him the free use of things according to his own will, without prohibiting him by any laws or injunctions. As we may say by way of similitude, the gospel has left us in the hands of our own counsel, that we may use and have dominion over all things as we will.

But Moses and the Pope left us not in that counsel, but restrained us by laws, and subjected us rather to their own will. But in the other kingdom he is not left in the hand of his own counsel, but is directed and led according to the will and counsel of God. And as in his own kingdom he is led according to his own will, without the precepts of another, so in the kingdom of God he is led according to the precepts of another, without his own will.

And this is what Ecclesiasticus means when he says, he added moreover his commandments and his precepts, saying, if thou wilt, and so forth. If therefore these things be satisfactorily clear, I have made it fully evident that this passage of Ecclesiasticus does not make for free will, but directly against it, seeing that it subjects man to the precepts and will of God, and takes from him his free will. But if they be not satisfactorily clear, I have at least made it manifest that this passage cannot make for free will, seeing that it may be understood in a sense different from that which they put upon it.

That is, in my sense already stated, which is not absurd, but most holy, and in harmony with the whole scripture. Whereas their sense militates against the whole scripture, and is fetched from this one passage only, contrary to the tenor of the whole scripture. I stand therefore secure in the good sense, the negative of free will, until they shall have confirmed their strained and forced affirmative.

When therefore Ecclesiasticus says, if thou wilt keep the commandments, and keep the faith that pleaseth me, they shall preserve thee, I do not see that free will can be proven from those words. For, if thou wilt, is a verb of the subjunctive mood, which asserts nothing. As the logicians say, a conditional asserts nothing indicatively.

Such as, if the devil be God, he is deservedly worshipped. If an ass fly, an ass has wings. So also, if there be free will, grace is nothing at all.

Therefore, if Ecclesiasticus had wished to assert free will, he ought to have spoken thus, man is able to keep the commandments of God. Or, man has the power to keep the commandments. Section 52.

But here the diatribe will simply retort, Ecclesiasticus, by saying, if thou wilt keep, signifies that there is a will in man to keep, and not to keep. Otherwise, what is the use of saying unto him who has no will, if thou wilt? Would it not be ridiculous, if any were to say to a blind man, if thou wilt see, thou mayest find a treasure? Or to a deaf man, if thou wilt hear, I will relate to thee an excellent story? This would be to laugh at their misery. I answer, these are the arguments of human reason, which is wont to shoot forth many such sprigs of wisdom.

Wherefore, I must dispute now, not with Ecclesiasticus, but with human reason concerning a conclusion. For she, by her conclusions and syllogisms, interprets and twists the scriptures of God, just which way she pleases. But I will enter upon this willingly, and with confidence, knowing that she can prate nothing but follies and absurdities, and that more especially when she attempts to make a show of her wisdom in these divine matters.

First then, if I should demand of her how it can be proved, that the freedom of the will in man is signified and inferred, wherever these expressions are used, if thou wilt, if thou wilt do, if thou wilt hear, she would say, because the nature of words and the common use of speech among men seem to require it. Therefore she judges of divine things and words according to the customs and things of men. Then which, what can be more perverse, seeing that the former things are heavenly, the latter earthly? Like a fool, therefore, she exposes herself, making it manifest that she has not a thought concerning God, but what is human.

But what if I prove that the nature of words and the use of speech, even among men, are not always of that tendency as to make a laughing-stock of those to whom it is said, if thou wilt, if thou shalt do it, if thou shalt hear? How often do parents thus play with their children, when they bid them come to them, or do this or that for this purpose only, that it may plainly appear to them how unable they are to do it, and that they may call for the aid of the parent's hand? How often does a faithful physician bid his obstinate patient do or omit those things which are either injurious to him or impossible, to the intent that he may bring him by an experience to the knowledge of his disease or his weakness? And what is more general and common than to use words of insult or provocation, when he would show either enemies or friends what they can do and what they cannot do? I merely go over these things to show reason in her own conclusions, and how absurdly she tacks them to the Scriptures. Moreover, how blind she must be not to see that they do not always stand good even in human words and things. But the case is, if she sees it to be done once, she rushes on headlong, taking it for granted that it is done generally in all things of God and men, thus making, according to the way of her wisdom, of a particularity and universality.

If then God, as a Father, deal with us as with sons, that he might show us who are in ignorance our impotency, or as a faithful physician, that he might make our disease known unto us, or that he might insult his enemies who proudly resist his counsel, and for this end say to us by proposed laws, as being those means by which he accomplishes his design the most effectively, do, hear, keep, or if thou wilt, if thou wilt do, if thou wilt hear, can this be drawn therefrom as a just conclusion? Therefore either we have free power to act, or God laughs at us? Why is this not rather drawn as a conclusion? Therefore God tries us, that by his law he might bring us to a knowledge of our impotency, if we be his friends, or he thereby righteously and deservedly insults and derides us, if we be his proud enemies. For this, as Paul teaches, is the intent of the divine legislation, Romans 3.20, 5.20, Galatians 3.19, 24, because human nature is blind, so that it knows not its own powers, or rather its own diseases. Moreover, being proud, it self-conceitedly imagines that it knows and can do all things, to remedy which pride and ignorance God can use no means more effectual than his proposed law, of which we shall say more in its place.

Let it suffice to have thus touched upon it here, to refute this conclusion of carnal and absurd wisdom, if thou wilt, therefore thou art able to will freely. The diatribe dreams that man is whole and sound, as, to human appearance, he is in his own affairs, and therefore from these words, if thou wilt, if thou wilt do, if thou wilt hear, it perty argues that man, if his will be not free, is laughed at. Whereas the scripture describes man as corrupt and a captive, and added to that as proudly contemning and ignorant of his corruption and captivity, and therefore by those words it goads him and rouses him up, that he might know by a real experience how unable he is to do any one of those things.

Section 53. But I will attack the diatribe itself. If thou really think, O Madam Reason, that these conclusions stand good, if thou wilt, therefore thou hast a free power, why dost thou not follow the same thyself? For thou sayest, according to that probable opinion, that free will cannot will anything good.

By what conclusion, then, can such a sentiment flow from this passage also, if thou wilt keep? When thou sayest that the conclusion flowing from this is that man can will and not will freely, what? Can bitter and sweet flow from the same fountain? Dost thou not hear much more deride man thyself, when thou sayest that he can keep that which he can neither will nor choose? Therefore neither dost thou from thy heart believe that this is a just conclusion, if thou wilt, therefore thou hast a free power, although thou contendest for it with so much zeal. Or, if thou dost believe it, then thou dost not from thy heart say that that opinion is probable, which holds that man cannot will good. Thus Reason is so caught in the conclusions and words of her own wisdom, that she knows not what she says, nor concerning what she speaks.

Nay, knows nothing but that which it is most right she should know, that free will is defended with such arguments as mutually devour, and put an end to each other. Just as the Midianites destroyed each other by mutual slaughter, when they fought against Gideon and the people of God, Judges 7. Nay, I will expostulate more fully with this wisdom of the diatribe. Ecclesiasticus does not say, If thou shalt have the desire and the endeavour of keeping, for this is not to be ascribed to that power of yours, as you have concluded.

But he says, If thou wilt keep the commandments, they shall preserve thee. Now then, if we, after the manner of your wisdom, wish to draw conclusions, we should infer thus. Therefore man is able

to keep the commandments.

And thus we shall not here make a certain small degree of desire, or a certain little effort of endeavour to be left in man, but we shall ascribe unto him the whole, full, and abundant power of keeping the commandments. Otherwise Ecclesiasticus will be made to laugh at the misery of man, as commanding him to keep, who he knows is not able to keep. Nor would it have been sufficient if he had supposed the desire and the endeavour to be in the man.

For he would not then have escaped the suspicion of deriding him, unless he had signified his having the full power of keeping. But however, let us suppose that that desire and endeavour of free will are a real something. What shall we say to those, the Pelagians I mean, who from this passage have denied grace in toto, and ascribed all to free will? If the conclusion of the diatribe stands good, the Pelagians have evidently established their point.

For the words of Ecclesiasticus speak of keeping, not of desiring or endeavouring. If, therefore, you deny the Pelagians their conclusions concerning keeping, they in reply will much more rightly deny you your conclusions concerning endeavouring. And if you take from them the whole of free will, they will take from you your remnant particle of it.

For you cannot assert a remnant particle of that which you deny in toto. In what degree soever, therefore, you speak against the Pelagians, who from this passage ascribe the whole to free will, in the same degree, and with much more determination, shall we speak against that certain small remnant desire of your free will. And in this the Pelagians themselves will agree with us, that if their opinion cannot be proved from this passage, much less will any other of the same kind be proved from it.

Seeing that if the subject be to be conducted by conclusions, Ecclesiasticus above all makes the most forcibly for the Pelagians, for he speaks in plain words concerning keeping only, if thou wilt keep the commandments. Nay, he speaks also concerning faith, if thou wilt keep the faith, so that by the same conclusion keeping the faith ought also to be in our power, which, however, is the peculiar and precious gift of God. In a word, since so many opinions are brought forward in support of free will, and there is no one that does not catch at this passage of Ecclesiasticus in defense of itself, and since they are diverse from and contrary to each other, it is impossible but that they must make Ecclesiasticus contradictory to and diverse from themselves in the selfsame words, and therefore they can from him prove nothing.

Although, if that conclusion of yours be admitted, it will make for the Pelagians against all the others, and consequently it makes against the diatribe, which in this passage is stabbed by its own sword. Section 54. But as I said at first, so I say here.

This passage of Ecclesiasticus is in favor of no one of those who assert free will, but makes against them all. For that conclusion is not to be admitted, if thou wilt, therefore thou art able. But those words, and all like unto them, are to be understood thus, that by them man is admonished of his impotency, which, without such admonitions, being proud and ignorant, he would neither know nor feel.

For he here speaks not concerning the first man only, but concerning any man, though it is of little consequence whether you understand it concerning the first man or any others. For although the

first man was not impotent from the assistance of grace, yet by this commandment God plainly shows him how impotent he would be without grace. For if that man who had the spirit could not by his new will will good newly proposed, that is obedience, because the spirit did not add it unto him, what can we do without the spirit toward that good that is lost? In this man, therefore, it is shown by a terrible example for the breaking down of our pride what our free will can do when it is left to itself, and not continually moved and increased by the spirit of God.

He could do nothing to increase the spirit who had its first fruits, but fell from the first fruits of the spirit. What then can we, who are fallen, do towards the first fruits of the spirit which are taken away? Especially since Satan now reigns in us with full power, who cast him down, not then reigning in him, but by temptation alone. Nothing can be more forcibly brought against free will than this passage of Ecclesiasticus, considered together with the fall of Adam.

But we have no room for these observations here. An opportunity may perhaps offer itself elsewhere. Meanwhile, it is sufficient to have shown that Ecclesiasticus in this place says nothing whatever in favor of free will, which nevertheless they consider as their principal authority.

And that these expressions and the like, if thou wilt, if thou hear, if thou do, show not what men can do, but what they ought to do. Section 55. Another passage is adduced by our diatribe out of Genesis 4, 7, where the Lord said unto Cain, Under thee shall be the desire of sin, and thou shalt rule over it.

Here it is shown, saith the diatribe, that the motions of the mind to evil can be overcome, and that they do not carry with them the necessity of sinning. These words, the motions of the mind to evil, can be overcome. Though spoken with ambiguity, yet from the scope of the sentiment, the consequence, and the circumstances, must mean thus, that free will has the power of overcoming its motions to evil, and that those motions do not bring upon it the necessity of sinning.

Here again, what is there accepted, which is not ascribed unto free will? What need is there of the Spirit? What need of Christ? What need of God, if free will can overcome the motions of the mind to evil? And where, again, is that probable opinion, which affirms that free will cannot so much as will good? For here the victory over evil is ascribed unto that which neither wills nor wishes for good. The inconsiderateness of our diatribe is really too, too bad. Take the truth of the matter in a few words.

As I have before observed by such passages as these, it is shown to man what he ought to do, not what he can do. It is said, therefore, unto Cain, that he ought to rule over his sin, and to hold its desires in subjection under him. But this he neither did nor could do, because he was already pressed down under the contrary dominion of Satan.

It is well known that the Hebrews frequently used the future indicative for the imperative, as in Exodus 20, 1 through 17, Thou shalt have none other gods but me, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, and in numberless other instances of the same kind. Otherwise, if these sentences were taken indicatively as they really stand, they would be promises of God, and as He cannot lie, it would come to pass that no man could sin, and then, as commands, they would be unnecessary. And if this were the case, then our interpreter would have translated this passage more correctly thus, Let its desire be under thee, and rule thou over it, Genesis 4.7. Even as it then ought also to be said concerning the woman, Be thou under thy husband, and let him rule over

thee, Genesis 3.16. But that it was not spoken indicatively unto Cain is manifest from this.

It would then have been a promise, whereas it was not a promise, because from the conduct of Cain the event proved the contrary. Section 56. The third passage is from Moses, Deuteronomy 30.19. I have set before thy face life and death, choose what is good, and so forth.

What words, say the diatribe, can be more plain? It leaves to man the liberty of choosing. I answer, What is more plain than that you are blind? How, I pray, does it leave the liberty of choosing? Is it by the expression choose? Therefore, as Moses saith choose, does it immediately come to pass that they do choose? Then there is no need of the Spirit. And as you so often repeat and inculcate the same things, I shall be justified in repeating the same things also.

If there be a liberty of choosing, why has the probable opinion said that free will cannot will good? Can it choose not willing, or against its will? But let us listen to the similitude. It would be ridiculous to say to a man standing in a place where two ways met, thou seest two roads, go by which thou wilt, when one only was open. This, as I have before observed, is from the arguments of human reason, which thinks that a man is mocked by a command impossible, whereas I say that the man by this means is admonished and roused to see his own impotency.

True it is that we are in a place where two ways meet, and that one of them only is open, yea, rather neither of them is open. But by the law it is shown how impossible the one is, that is, to good unless God freely give his spirit, and how wide and easy the other is if God leave us to ourselves. Therefore it would not be said ridiculously, but with a necessary seriousness, to the man thus standing in a place where two ways meet, go by which thou wilt, if he being in reality impotent wished to seem to himself strong, or contended that neither way was hedged up.

Wherefore the words of the law are spoken not that they might assert the power of the will, but that they might illuminate the blindness of reason, that it might see that its own light is nothing, and that the power of the will is nothing. By the law, saith Paul, is the knowledge of sin, Romans 3.20. He does not say, is the evolution of, or the escape from sin. The whole nature and design of the law is to give knowledge only, and that of nothing else save of sin, but not to discover or communicate any power whatever, for knowledge is not power, nor does it communicate power, but it teaches, and shows how great the impotency must there be where there is no power.

And what else can the knowledge of sin be but the knowledge of our evil and infirmity? For he does not say, by the law comes the knowledge of strength or of good. The whole that the law does, according to the testimony of Paul, is to make known sin. And this is the place where I take occasion to enforce this my general reply, that man, by the words of the law, is admonished and taught what he ought to do, not what he can do.

That is, that he is brought to know his sin, but not to believe that he has any strength in himself. Wherefore, friend Erasmus, as often as you throw in my teeth the words of the law, so often I throw in yours that of Paul. By the law is the knowledge of sin, not of the power of the will.

Heap together, therefore, out of the large concordances, all the imperative words into one chaos, provided that they be not words of the promise, but of the requirement of the law only. And I will immediately declare that by them is always shown what man ought to do, not what they can do or do do. And even common grammarians and every little school boy in the street knows that by

verbs of the imperative mood nothing else is signified than that which ought to be done, and that what is done or can be done is expressed by verbs of the indicative mood.

Thus, therefore, it comes to pass that you theologians are so senseless, and so many degrees below even schoolboys, that when you have caught hold of one imperative verb you infer an indicative sense, as though what was commanded were immediately and even necessarily done, or possible to be done. But how many slips are there between the cup and the lip, so that what you command to be done, and is therefore quite possible to be done, is yet never done at all? Such a difference is there between verbs imperative and verbs indicative, even in the most common and easy things. Whereas you, in these things which are as far above those as the heavens are above the earth, so quickly make indicatives out of imperatives, that the moment you hear the voice of him commanding, saying do, keep, choose, you will have that it is immediately kept, done, chosen, or fulfilled, or that our powers are able so to do.

Section 57. In the fourth place you adduce from Deuteronomy 30 many passages of the same kind which speak of choosing, of turning away from, of keeping, as if thou shalt keep, if thou shalt turn away from, if thou shalt choose. All these expressions you say are made use of preposterously if there be not a free will in man unto good.

I answer, and you, friend diatribe, preposterously enough also conclude from these expressions the freedom of the will. You set out to prove the endeavor and desire of free will only, and you have adduced no passage which proves such an endeavor. But now you adduce those passages which, if your conclusion holds good, will ascribe all to free will.

Let me here then again make a distinction between the words of the scripture adduced and the conclusion of the diatribe tacked to them. The words adduced are imperative, and they say nothing but what ought to be done. For Moses does not say thou hast the power and strength to choose.

The words choose, keep, do convey the precept to keep, but they do not describe the ability of man. But the conclusion tacked to them by that wisdom-aping diatribe infers thus. Therefore man can do those things, otherwise the precepts are given in vain, to whom this reply must be made.

Madam diatribe, you make a bad inference and do not prove your conclusion, but the conclusion and the proof merely seem to be right in your blind and inadvertent self. But know that these precepts are not given preposterously nor in vain, but that proud and blind man might by them learn the disease of his own impotency, if he should attempt to do what is commanded. And hence your similitude amounts to nothing, where you say, otherwise it would be precisely the same as if anyone should say to a man who was so bound that he could only stretch forth his left arm, Behold, thou hast on thy right hand excellent wine, thou hast on thy left poison, on which thou wilt stretch forth thy hand.

These, your similitudes, I presume, are particular favorites of yours. But you do not all the while see that if the similitudes stand good, they prove much more than you ever purposed to prove. Nay, that they prove what you deny, and would have to be disproved, that free will can do all things.

For by the whole scope of your argument, forgetting what you said that free will can do nothing without grace, you actually prove that free will can do all things without grace. For your

conclusions and similitudes go to prove this, that neither free will can of itself do those things which are said and commanded, or they are commanded in vain, ridiculously and preposterously. But these are nothing more than the old songs of the Pelagians, sung over again, which even the sophists have exploded, and which you have yourself condemned.

And by all this your forgetfulness and disorder of memory, you do nothing but evince how little you know the subject, and how little you are affected by it. And what can be worse in a rhetorician than to be continually bringing forward things wide of the nature of the subject, and not only so, but to be always declaiming against his subject and against himself? Section 58. Wherefore, I observe finally, the passages of Scripture adduced by you are imperative, and neither prove anything nor determine anything concerning the ability of man, but enjoin only what things are to be done, and what are not to be done.

And as to your conclusions or appendages and similitudes, if they prove anything, they prove this, that free will can do all things without grace. Whereas this you did not undertake to prove. Nay, it is by you denied.

Wherefore these your proofs are nothing else but the most direct computations. For, that I may, if I can, rouse the diatribe from its lethargy, suppose I argue thus. If Moses say, Choose life, and keep the commandment, unless man be able to choose life and keep the commandment, Moses gives that precept to man ridiculously.

Have I by this argument proved my side of the subject, that free will can do nothing good, and that it has no external endeavor separate from its own power? Nay, on the contrary, I have proved by an assertion sufficiently forcible, that either man can choose life and keep the commandment as it is commanded, or Moses is a ridiculous lawgiver. It follows, therefore, that man can do the things that are commanded. This is the way in which the diatribe argues throughout, contrary to its own purposed design, wherein it promised that it would not argue thus, but would prove a certain endeavor of free will.

Of which, however, so far from proving it, it scarcely makes mention in the whole string of its arguments. Nay, it proves the contrary rather, so that it may itself be more properly said to affirm and argue all things ridiculously. And as to its making it, according to its own adduced similitude, to be ridiculous, that a man having his right arm bound should be ordered to stretch forth his right hand, when he could only stretch forth his left, would it, I pray, be ridiculous, if a man having both his arms bound, and proudly contending or ignorantly presuming that he could do anything right or left, should be commanded to stretch forth his hand right and left, not that his captivity might be derided, but that he might be convinced of his false presumption of liberty and power, and might be brought to know his ignorance of his captivity and misery.

The diatribe is perpetually setting before us such a man who either can do what is commanded, or at least knows that he cannot do it, whereas no such man is to be found. If there were such in one, then, indeed, either impossibilities would be ridiculously commanded, or the spirit of Christ would be in vain. The scripture, however, sets forth such a man who is not only bound, miserable, captive, sick, and dead, but who by the operation of his lord Satan to his other miseries adds that of blindness, so that he believes he is free, happy, at liberty, powerful, whole, and alive.

For Satan well knows that if men knew their own misery he could retain no one of them in his kingdom, because it could not be but that God would immediately pity and succor their own misery and calamity, seeing that he is with so much praise set forth throughout the whole scripture as being near unto the contrite in heart, that Isaiah 61, 1 through 3 testifies that Christ was sent to preach the gospel to the poor and to heal the brokenhearted. Wherefore the work of Satan is so to hold men that they come not to know their misery, but that they presume that they can do all things which are enjoined. But the work of Moses the legislator is the contrary, even that by the law he might discover to man his misery, in order that he might prepare him thus bruised and confounded with the knowledge of himself for grace, and might send him to Christ to be saved.

Wherefore the office of the law is not ridiculous, but above all things serious and necessary. Those therefore who thus far understand these things understand clearly at the same time that the diatribe by the whole string of its arguments affects nothing whatever, that it collects nothing from the scriptures but imperative passages, when it understands neither what they mean nor wherefore they are spoken, and that moreover by the appendages of its conclusions and carnal similitudes it mixes up such a mighty mass of flesh that it asserts and proves more than it ever intended and argues against itself. So that there were no need to pursue particulars any further, for the whole is solved by one solution, seeing that the whole depends on one argument.

But, however, that it may be drowned in the same profusion in which it attempted to drown me, I will proceed to touch upon a few particulars more. End of section 58

## 06 - Sections 59-75: Discussion, Part I-b

---

Sections 59 through 75 of the Bondage of the Will by Martin Luther. Translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain.

Discussion. First part continued. Section 59.

There is that of Isaiah 119, If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the fat of the land. Where, according to the judgment of the diatribe, if there be no liberty of the will, it would have been more consistent had it been said, If I will, if I will not. The answer to this may be plainly found in what has been said before.

Moreover, what consistency would there then have been had it been said, If I will, ye shall eat the fat of the land. Does the diatribe, from its so highly exalted wisdom, imagine that the fat of the land can be eaten contrary to the will of God, or that it is a rare and new thing that we do not receive of the fat of the land but by the will of God? So also that of Isaiah 30, 21, If ye will inquire, inquire ye, return, come. To what purpose is it, saith the diatribe, to exhort those who are not in any degree in their own power? It is just like saying to one bound in chains, Move thyself to this place.

Nay, I reply, to what purpose is it to cite passages which of themselves prove nothing, and which by the appendage of your conclusion, that is, by the perversion of their sense, ascribe all unto free will, when a certain endeavour only was to be ascribed unto it and to be proved? The same may be said, you observe, concerning that of Isaiah 45, 20, Assemble yourselves, and come. Turn ye unto me, and ye shall be saved. And that also of Isaiah 52, 1 through 2, Awake, awake, shake thyself from the dust, Loose the bands of thy neck.

And that of Jeremiah 15, 19, If thou wilt turn, then will I turn thee, And if thou shalt separate the precious from the vile, Thou shalt be as my mouth. And Malachi more evidently still indicates the endeavour of free will and the grace that is prepared for him who endeavours. Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, And I will turn unto you, saith the Lord.

Malachi 3, 7 In these passages our friend Diatribe makes no distinction whatever between the voice of the law and the voice of the gospel. Because, forsooth, it is so blind and so ignorant that it knows not what is the law and what is the gospel. For out of all the passages from Isaiah, it produces no one word of the law save this, If thou wilt.

All the rest is gospel, by which, as the word of offered grace, the bruised and afflicted are called unto consolation. Whereas the Diatribe makes them words of the law. But I pray thee, tell me, what can that man do in theological matters and the sacred writings, who has not even gone so far as to know what is law and what is gospel? Or who, if he does know, condemns the observance of the distinction between them? Such an one must confound all things, heaven with hell, and life with death, and will never labour to know anything of Christ.

Concerning which I shall put my friend Diatribe a little in remembrance in what follows. Look then first at that of Jeremiah and Malachi. If thou wilt turn, then will I turn thee, and turn ye unto me, and

I will turn unto you.

Does it then follow from turn ye, therefore ye are able to turn? Does it follow also from love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, therefore thou art able to love with all thy heart? If these arguments stand good, what do they conclude but that free will needs not the grace of God, but can do all things of its own power? And then, how much more right would it be that the words should be received as they stand? If thou shalt turn, then will I also turn thee. That is, if thou shalt cease from sinning, I also will cease from punishing. And if thou shalt be converted and live well, I also will do well unto thee in turning away thy captivity and thy evils.

But even in this way it does not follow that man can turn by his own power, nor do the words imply this, but they simply say, If thou wilt turn, by which a man is admonished of what he ought to do. And when he has thus known and seen what he ought to do but cannot do, he would ask how he is to do it. Were it not for that leviathan of the diatribe, that is, that appendage and conclusion it is here tacked on, which comes in and between, and says, Therefore, if man cannot turn of his own power, turn ye is spoken in vain.

But of what nature all such conclusion is, and what it amounts to, has been already fully shown. It must, however, be a certain stupor or lethargy which can hold that the power of free will is confirmed by these words, Turn ye, if thou wilt turn, and the like. And does not see that for the same reason it must be confirmed by this scripture also, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, seeing that the meaning of him who commands and requires is the same in both instances.

For the loving of God is not less required than our conversion and the keeping of all the commandments. Because the loving of God is our real conversion, and yet no one attempts to prove free will from that command to love, although from those words, If thou wilt, if thou wilt hear, turn ye, and the like, all attempt to prove it. If, therefore, from that word, Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, it does not follow that free will is anything or can do anything, it is certain that it neither follows from these words, If thou wilt, if thou wilt hear, turn ye, and the like, which either require less or require with less force of importance than these words, Love God, love the Lord.

Whatever, therefore, is said against drawing a conclusion in support of free will from this word, Love God, the same must be said against drawing a conclusion in support of free will from every other word of command or requirement. For if by the command to love the nature of the law only be shown, and what we ought to do, but not the power of the will or what we can do, but rather what we cannot do, the same is shown by all the other scriptures of requirement. For it is well known that even the schoolmen, except the Scotinians and moderns, assert that man cannot love God with all his heart.

Therefore, neither can he perform any one of the other precepts, for all the rest, according to the testimony of Christ, hang on this one. Hence, by the testimony even of the doctors of the schools, this remains as a settled conclusion, that the words of the law do not prove the power of free will, but show what we ought to do and what we cannot do. Section 61 But our friend Diatribe, proceeding to still greater lengths of inconsiderateness, not only infers from that passage of Malachi 3.7, Turn ye unto me, an indicative sense, but also goes on with zeal to prove therefrom the endeavor of free will and the grace prepared for the person endeavoring.

Here, at last, it makes mention of the endeavor, and by a new kind of grammar, to turn, signifies with it the same thing as to endeavor, so that the sense is, Turn ye unto me, that is, endeavor ye to turn. And I will turn unto you, that is, I will endeavor to turn unto you. So that, at last, it attributes an endeavor even unto God, and perhaps would have grace to be prepared for him upon his endeavoring.

For if turning signify endeavoring in one place, why not in every place? Again, it says that from Jeremiah 15.19, If thou shalt separate the precious from the vile, not the endeavor only, but the liberty of choosing is proved, which before it declared was lost, and changed into a necessity of serving sin. You see, therefore, that in handling the scriptures, the diatribe has a free will with a witness, so that with it words of the same kind are compelled to prove endeavor in one place and liberty in another, just as the turn suits. But to a way with vanities, the word turn is used in the scriptures in a twofold sense, the one legal, the other evangelical.

In the legal sense, it is the voice of the exactor and commander, which requires not an endeavor, but a change in the whole life. In this sense, Jeremiah frequently uses it, saying, Turn ye now every one of you from his evil way, and turn ye unto the Lord, in which he involves the requirement of all the commandments, as is sufficiently evident. In the evangelical sense, it is the voice of the divine consolation and promise, by which nothing is demanded of us, but in which the grace of God is offered unto us.

Of this kind is that of Psalm 126, 1, when the Lord shall turn again the captivity of Zion, and that of Psalm 116, 7, turn again unto thy rest, O my soul. Hence, Malachi, in a very brief compendium, has set forth the preaching both of the law and of grace. It is the whole sum of the law, where he saith, Turn ye unto me, and it is grace where he saith, I will turn unto you.

Wherefore, as much as free will is proved from this word, Love the Lord, or from any other word of particular law, just so much is it proved from this word of summary law, Turn ye. It becomes a wise reader of the scriptures, therefore, to observe what are words of the law, and what are words of grace, that he might not be involved in confusion, like the unclean sophists, and like this sleepily yawning diatribe. Section 62 Now observe in what way the diatribe handles that single passage in Ezekiel 18.23. As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.

In the first place, if it says, the expressions, Shall turn away, hath done, hath committed, be so often repeated in this chapter, where are they who deny that man can do anything? Only remark, I pray, the excellent conclusion. It set out to prove the endeavor and the desire of free will, and now it proves the whole work, that all things are fulfilled by free will. Where now, I pray, are those who need grace in the Holy Spirit? For it pertly argues thus, saying, Ezekiel says, if the wicked man shall turn away, and shall do righteousness and judgment, he shall live.

Therefore the wicked man does that immediately, and can do it. Whereas Ezekiel is signifying what ought to be done, but the diatribe understands it as being done, and having been done. Thus teaching us by a new kind of grammar, that ought to be, is the same as having been, being exacted, the same as being performed, and being required, the same as being rendered.

And then, that voice of the all-sweet gospel, I desire not the death of a sinner, and so forth, it perverts thus, Would the righteous Lord deplore that death of his people, which he himself wrought

in them? If, therefore, he wills not our death, it certainly is to be laid to the charge of our own will, if we perish. For what can you lay to the charge of him, who can do nothing, either of good or evil? It was upon this same thing, that Pelagius harped long ago, when he attributed to free will, not a desire, nor an endeavor only, but the power of doing, and fulfilling all things. For, as I have said before, these conclusions prove that power, if they prove anything, so that they make with equal, nay, with more force, against the diatribe which denies that power of free will, and which attempts to establish the endeavor only, than they do against us who deny free will altogether.

But, to say nothing of the ignorance of the diatribe, let us speak to the subject. It is the gospel voice, and the sweetest consolation to miserable sinners, where Ezekiel saith, I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live. And it is in all respects likened to that of Psalm 35, for his wrath is but for a moment, in his willingness is life.

And that of Psalm 36, 7, How sweet is thy lovingkindness, O God! Also, for I am merciful. And that of Christ, Matthew 11, 28, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. And also that of Exodus 26, I will show mercy unto thousands of them that love me.

And what is more than half of the Holy Scripture, but mere promises of grace, by which mercy, life, peace, and salvation, are extended from God unto men? And what else is the whole word of promise but this, I desire not the death of a sinner? Is not this saying, I am merciful? The same is saying, I am not angry, I am unwilling to punish, I desire not your death, My will is to pardon, My will is to spare. And if there were not these divine promises standing, by which consciences, afflicted with a sense of sin, and terrified at the fear of death and judgment, might be raised up, what place would there be for pardon or for hope? What sinner would not sink in despair? But as free will is not proved from any of the other words of mercy, of promise, or of comfort, so neither is it from this, I desire not the death of a sinner, and so forth. But our friend diatribe, again making no distinction between the words of the law, and the words of the promise, makes this passage of Ezekiel, the voice of the law, and expounds it thus, I desire not the death of a sinner.

That is, I desire not that he should sin unto death, or should become a sinner guilty of death, but rather that he should be converted from sin, if he have committed any, and thus live. For if it do not expound the passage thus, it will make nothing to its purpose. But this is utterly to destroy and take away that most sweet place of Ezekiel, I desire not the death.

If we in our blindness will read and understand the scriptures thus, what wonder if they be obscure and ambiguous. Whereas God does not say, I desire not the sin of man, but I desire not the death of a sinner, which manifestly shows that he is speaking of the punishment of sin, of which the sinner has a sense on account of his sin, that is, of the fear of death, and that he is raising up and comforting the sinner lying under this affliction and desperation, that he might not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but raise him to the hope of pardon and salvation, in order that he might be further converted, that is, by the conversion unto salvation from the fear of death, and that he might live, that is, might be in peace and rejoice in a good conscience. And this is also to be observed, that as the voice of the law is not pronounced, but upon those who neither feel nor know their sins, as Paul saith, by the law is the knowledge of sin, Romans 3.20, so the word of grace does not come but unto those who, feeling their sins, are distressed and exercised with desperation.

Therefore, in all the words of the law, you will find sin to be implied while it shows what we ought to do, as on the contrary, in all the words of the promise, you will find the evil to be implied under which the sinners, or those who are raised up, labor, as here, I desire not the death of a sinner, clearly points out the death and the sinner, both the evil itself which is felt and the sinner himself who feels it. But by this, love God with all thine heart, is shown what good we ought to do, not what evil we feel, in order that we might know how far we are from doing good. Section 63 Nothing, therefore, could be more absurdly adduced in support of free will than this passage of Ezekiel, nay, it makes with all possible force directly against free will.

For it is here shown in what state free will is and what it can do under the knowledge of sin, and in turning itself from it. That is, that it can only go on to worse, and add to it sin's desperation and impenitency, unless God soon come in to help, and to call back, and raise up by the word of promise. For the concern of God in promising grace to recall and raise up the sinner is itself an argument sufficiently great and conclusive that free will of itself cannot but go on to worse, and, as the scriptures saith, fall down to hell.

Unless, indeed, you imagine that God is such a trifler that he pours forth so great an abundance of the words of promise, not from any necessity of them unto our salvation, but from a mere delight in loquacity. Wherefore, you see, that not only all the words of the law stand against free will, but also that all the words of the promise is utterly confuted, that is, that the whole scripture makes directly against it. Hence, you see, this word, I desire not the death of a sinner, does nothing else but preach and offer divine mercy to the world, which none receive with joy and gratitude but those who are distressed and exercised with the fears of death.

For they are they in whom the law has now done its office, that is, in bringing them to the knowledge of sin. But they who have not yet experienced the office of the law, who do not yet know their sin nor feel the fears of death, despise the mercy promised in that word. Section 64 But why is it that some are touched by the law and some are not touched? Why some receive the offered grace and some despise it? That is another question which is not here treated on by Ezekiel, because he is speaking of the preached and offered mercy of God, not of that secret and to be feared will of God, who, according to his own counsel, ordains whom and such as he will to be receivers and partakers of the preached and offered mercy, which will is not to be curiously inquired into but to be adored with reverence as the most profound secret of the divine majesty which he reserves unto himself and keeps hidden from us, and that much more religiously than the mention of ten thousand Coriccan caverns.

But since the diatribe thus pertly argues, would the righteous Lord deplore that death of his people which he himself works in them? This would seem quite absurd. I answer, as I said before, we are to argue in one way concerning the will of God preached, revealed, and offered unto us and worshipped by us, and in another concerning God himself, not preached, not revealed, not offered unto us and worshipped by us. In whatever, therefore, God hides himself and will be unknown by us, that is nothing unto us, and here that sentiment stands good, what is above us does not concern us.

And that no one might think that this distinction is my own, I follow Paul, who, writing to the Thessalonians concerning Antichrist, saith, 2 Thessalonians 2, 4, that he should exalt himself above all that is God as preached and worshipped, evidently intimating that anyone might be

exalted above God as he is preached and worshipped, that is, above the word and worship of God, by which he is known unto us and has intercourse with us, but above God not worshipped and preached, that is, as he is in his own nature and majesty, nothing can be exalted, but all things are under his powerful hand. God, therefore, is to be left to remain in his own nature and majesty, for in this respect we have nothing to do with him, nor does he wish us to have in this respect anything to do with him, but we have to do with him as far as he is clothed in and delivered to us by his word, for in that he presents himself unto us, and that is his beauty and his glory, in which the psalmist celebrates him as being clothed. Wherefore we say that the righteous God does not deplore that death of his people which he himself works in them, but he deplores that death which he finds in his people and which he desires to remove from them.

For God preached desires this, that our sin and death being taken away, we might be saved. He sent his word and healed them. Psalm 107, 20 But God hidden in majesty neither deplores nor takes away death but works life and death and all things, nor has he in this character defined himself in his word but has reserved unto himself a free power over all things.

But the diatribe is deceived by its own ignorance in not making a distinction between God preached and God hidden, that is, between the word of God and God himself. God does many things which he does not make known unto us in his word. He also wills many things which he does not in his word make known unto us that he wills.

Thus he does not will the death of a sinner, that is, in his word, but he wills it by that will inscrutable. But in the present case we are to consider his word only and to leave that will inscrutable, seeing that it is by his word and not by that will inscrutable that we are to be guided, for who can direct himself according to a will inscrutable and incomprehensible? It is enough to know only that there is in God a certain will inscrutable. But what, why, and how far that will wills it is not lawful to inquire, to wish to know, to be concerned about, or to reach unto.

It is only to be feared and adored. Therefore it is rightly said if God does not desire our death it is to be laid to the charge of our own will if we perish. This, I say, is right if you speak of God preached, for he desires that all men should be saved, seeing that he comes unto all by the word of salvation, and it is the fault of the will which does not receive him.

As he saith, Matthew 23, 37, How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldst not. But why that majesty does not take away or change this fault of the will in all, seeing that it is not in the power of man to do it, or why he lays that to the charge of the will which the man cannot avoid, it becomes us not to inquire. And though you should inquire much, yet you will never find out, as Paul saith, Romans 9, 20, Who art thou that replyest against God? Suffice it to have spoken thus upon the passage of Ezekiel.

Now let us proceed to the remaining particulars. Section 65 The diatribe next argues, If what is commanded be not in the power of everyone, all the numberless exhortations in the scriptures, and also all the promises, threatenings, expostulations, reproofs, asseverations, benedictions, and maledictions, together with all the forms of precepts, must of necessity stand coldly useless. The diatribe is perpetually forgetting the subject point, and going on with that which is contrary to its professed design.

And it does not see that all these things make with greater force against itself than against us. For from all these passages, it proves the liberty and ability to fulfill all things, as the very words of the conclusion which it draws necessarily declare. Whereas its design was to prove that free will is that which cannot will anything good without grace, and is a certain endeavor that is not to be ascribed to its own powers.

But I do not see that such an endeavor is proved by any of these passages, but that, as I have repeatedly said already, that only is required which ought to be done, unless it be needful to repeat it again as often as the diatribe harps upon the same string, putting off its readers with a useless profusion of words. About the last passage which it brings forward out of the Old Testament is that of Deuteronomy 30, 11 through 14. This commandment which I command thee today is not above thee, neither is it far off, neither is it in heaven, that thou shouldst say, who of us shall ascend up into heaven and bring it down unto us, that we may hear it and do it.

But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. The diatribe contends that it is declared by this passage that what is commanded is not only placed in us, but is downhill work, that is, easy to be done, or at least not difficult. I thank the diatribe for such wonderful erudition, for if Moses so plainly declare that there is in us not only an ability, but also a power to keep all the commandments with ease, why have I been toiling all this time? Why did I not at once produce this passage and assert free will before the whole world? What need now of Christ? What need of the Spirit? We have now found a passage which stops the mouths of all, and which not only plainly asserts the liberty of the will, but teaches that the observance of all the commandments is easy.

What need was there for Christ to purchase for us, even with his own blood, the Spirit, as though necessary, in order that he might make the keeping of the commandments easy unto us, when we were already thus qualified by nature? Nay, here the diatribe itself recants its own assertions, where it affirmed that free will cannot will anything good without grace, and now affirms that free will is of such power that it can not only will good, but keep the greatest, nay, all the commandments, with ease. Only observe, I pray, what a mind does where the heart is not in the cause, and how impossible it is that it should not expose itself. And can there still be any need to confute the diatribe? Who can more effectually confute it than it confutes itself? This truly is that beast that devours itself.

How true is the proverb that a liar should have a good memory. I have already spoken upon this passage of Deuteronomy. I shall now treat upon it briefly.

If indeed there be any need so far to set aside Paul, who, Romans 10, 5-11, so powerfully handles this passage. You can see nothing here to be said, nor one single syllable to speak, either of the ease or difficulty, of the power or impotency of free will or of man, either to keep or not to keep the commandments. Except that those who entangle the scriptures in their own conclusions and cogitations make them obscure and ambiguous to themselves, that they might thus make of them what they please.

But if you cannot turn your eyes this way, turn your ears or feel out what I am about to say with your hands. Moses saith, It is not above thee, neither is it far from thee, neither is it in heaven, neither is it beneath the sea. Now, what is the meaning of this? Above thee.

What of this? Far from thee. What of this? In heaven. What of this? Beyond the sea.

Will they then make the most commonly used terms and even grammar so obscure unto us that we shall not be able to speak anything to a certainty, merely that they might establish their assertion that the scriptures are obscure? According to my grammar, these terms signify neither the quality nor the quantity of human powers, but the distance of places only. For above thee does not signify a certain power of the will, but a certain place which is above us, so also far from thee, in heaven, beyond the sea, do not signify anything of ability in man, but a certain place at a distance above us, or on our right hand, or on our left hand, or behind us, or over against us. Some one may perhaps laugh at me for disputing it so plain a way, thus setting, as it were, a ready-marked-out lesson before such great men, as though they were little boys learning their alphabet and I were teaching them how to put syllables together.

But what can I do? When I see darkness to be sought for in a light so clear, and those studiously desiring to be blind who boastingly enumerate before us such a series of ages, so much talent, so many saints, so many martyrs, so many doctors, and who with so much authority boast of this passage, and yet will not deign to look at the syllables, or to command their cogitations so far as to give the passage of which they boast one consideration. Let the diatribe now go home and consider, and say how it can be that one poor private individual should see that which escaped the notice of so many public characters, and of the greatest men of so many ages. This passage surely, even in the judgment of a schoolboy, proves that they must have been blind not very unfrequently.

What therefore does Moses mean by these most plain and clear words, but that he has worthily performed his office as a faithful lawgiver? And that therefore, if all men have not before their eyes and do not know all the precepts which are enjoined, the fault does not rest with him. That they have no place left them for excuse, so as to say they did not know, or had not the precepts, or were obliged to seek them elsewhere. That if they do not keep them, the fault rests not with the law, or with the lawgiver, but with themselves, seeing that the law is before them, and the lawgiver has taught them.

And that they have no place left for excusation of ignorance, only for accusation of negligence and disobedience. It is not, saith he, necessary to fetch the laws down from heaven, nor from lands beyond the sea, nor from afar, nor can you frame as an excuse that you never had them or heard them, for you have them nigh unto you. They are they which God hath commanded, which you have heard from my mouth, and which you have had in your hearts and in your mouths continually.

You have heard them treated on by the Levites in the midst of you, of which this my word and book are witnesses. This, therefore, only remains, that you do them. What, I pray you, is here attributed unto free will? What is there but the demanding that it would do the laws which it has, and the taking away from it the excuse of ignorance and the want of the laws? These passages are the sum of what the diatribe brings forward out of the Old Testament in support of free will, which, being answered, there remains nothing that is not answered at the same time, whether it have brought forward or wished to bring forward more, seeing that it could bring forward nothing but imperative or conditional or optative passages, by which is signified not what we can do or do do, as I have so often replied to the so often repeating diatribe, but what we ought to do and what is

required of us, in order that we might come to the knowledge of our impotency, and that there might be wrought in us the knowledge of our sin.

Or, if they do prove anything, by means of the appended conclusions and similitudes invented by human reason, they prove this, that free will is not a certain small degree of endeavor or desire only, but a full and free ability and power to do all things without the grace of God and without the Holy Spirit. Thus, nothing less is proved by the whole sum of that copious and again and again reiterated and inculcated argumentation than that which was aimed at to be proved, that is, the probable opinion, by which free will is defined to be of that impotency that it cannot will anything good without grace, but is compelled unto the service of sin, though it has an endeavor which nevertheless is not to be ascribed to its own powers. A monster, truly, which at the same time can do nothing by its own power and yet has an endeavor within its own power and thus stands upon the basis of the most manifest contradiction.

Section 66 Now we come to the New Testament, where again are marshaled up in defense of that miserable bondage of free will and host of imperative sentences, together with all the auxiliaries of carnal reasons, such as conclusions, similitudes and so forth, called in from all quarters. And if you ever saw represented in a picture or imagined in a dream a king of flies, attended by his forces, armed with lances and shields of straw or hay, drawn up in battle array against the real and complete army of veteran warriors, it is just thus that the human dreams of the diatribe are drawn up in battle array against the hosts of the word of God. First of all, marches forth in front that of Matthew 23, 37-39, as it were the Achilles of these flies.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldest not. If all things be done from necessity, says the diatribe, might not Jerusalem here have justly said in reply to the Lord, Why dost thou weary thyself with useless tears? If thou didst not will that we should kill the prophets, why didst thou send them? Why dost thou lay that to our charge which from will in thee was done of necessity by us? Thus the diatribe. I answer, granting in the meantime that this conclusion and proof of the diatribe is good and true, what I ask is proved thereby.

That probable opinion which affirms that free will cannot will good? Nay, the will is proved to be free, whole, and able to do all things which the prophets have spoken, and such a will the diatribe never intended to prove. But let the diatribe here reply to itself. If free will cannot will good, why is it laid to its charge that it did not hear the prophets, whom, as they taught good, it could not hear by its own powers? Why does Christ in useless tears weep over those as though they could have willed that which he certainly knew they could not will? Here I say, let the diatribe free Christ from the imputation of madness, according to its probable opinion.

And then my opinion is immediately set free from that Achilles of the flies. Therefore that passage of Matthew either forcibly proves free will altogether, or makes with equal force against the diatribe itself, and strikes it prostrate with its own weapon. But I here observe, as I have observed before, that we are not to dispute concerning that secret will of the divine majesty, and that that human temerity, which with incessant perverseness is ever leaving those things that are necessary and attacking and trying this point, is to be called off and driven back, that it employ not itself in prying into those secrets of majesty which it is impossible to attain unto, seeing that they dwell in that light which is inaccessible, as Paul witnesseth, 1 Timothy 6.16. But let the man acquaint himself with

the God incarnate, or as Paul saith, with Jesus crucified, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, but hidden.

For in him there is an abundance, both of that which he ought to know, and of that which he ought not to know. The God incarnate, then, here speaks thus, I would, and thou wouldst not. The God incarnate, I say, was sent for this purpose, that he might desire, speak, do, suffer, and offer unto all, all things that are necessary unto salvation, although he should offend many, who being either left or hardened by that secret will of majesty should not receive him thus desiring, speaking, doing, and offering, as John 1.5 saith, The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.

And again he came unto his own, and his own received him not. 11. It belongs also to this same God incarnate to weep, to lament, and to sigh over the perdition of the wicked, even while that will of majesty, from purpose, leaves and reprobates some, that they might perish.

Nor does it become us to inquire why he does so, but to revere that God who can do and wills to do such things. Nor do I suppose that anyone will covillingly deny that that will which here saith, how often would I, was displayed to the Jews even before God became incarnate, seeing that they are accused of having slain the prophets before Christ, and having thus resisted his will. For it is well known among Christians that all things were done by the prophets in the name of Christ to come, who was promised that he should become incarnate, so that whatever has been offered unto men by the ministers of the word from the foundation of the world may be rightly called the will of Christ.

Section 67 But here Reason, who is always very knowing and loquacious, will say, This is an excellently invented scapegab, that as often as we are pressed close by the force of arguments, we might run back to that to be revered will of majesty, and thus silence the disputant as soon as he becomes troublesome, just as astrologers do, who, by their invented epicycles, elude all questions concerning the motion of the whole heaven. I answer, It is no invention of mine, but a command supported by the holy scriptures. Paul, Romans 9, 19, speaks thus, Why therefore doth God find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay, but, O man, who art thou that contendest with God? Hath not the potter power? And so on.

And before him, Isaiah 58, 2, Yet they seek me daily, and desire to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness. They ask of me the ordinances of justice, and desire to approach unto God. From these words it is, I think, sufficiently manifest, that it is not lawful for men to search into that will of majesty.

And this subject is of that nature that perverse men are here the most led to pry into that to be revered will. And therefore, there is here the greatest reason why they should be exhorted to silence and reverence. In other subjects, where those things are handled for which we can give a reason, and for which we are commanded to give a reason, we do not this.

And if anyone still persists in searching into the reason of that will, and do not choose to hearken to our admonition, we let him go on, and, like the giants, fight against God, while we look on to see what triumph he will gain, persuaded in ourselves that he will do nothing either to injure our cause, or to advance his own. For it will still remain unalterable that he must either prove that free will can do all things, or that the scriptures which he adduces must make against himself. And whichsoever

of the two shall take place, he, vanquished, lies prostrate, while we, as conquerors, stand upright.

Section 68 Another passage is that of Matthew 19, 17. If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. With what face, says the diatribe, can, if thou wilt, be said to him who has not a free will? To which I reply, Is therefore the will, according to this word of Christ, free? But you wish to prove that free will cannot will anything good, and that without grace it of necessity serves sin.

With what face, then, do you now make will wholly free? The same reply will be made to that also, if thou wilt be perfect, if anyone will come after me, he that will save his life, if ye love me, if ye shall continue. In a word, as I said before, to ease the diatribe's labor in adducing such a load of words, let all the conditional ifs and all the imperative verbs be collected together. All these precepts, says the diatribe, stand coldly useless if nothing be attributed to the human will.

How ill does that conjunctive if accord with mere necessity? I answer, If they stand coldly useless, it is your fault that they stand coldly useless. Who, at one time, assert that nothing is to be attributed to free will, while you make free will unable to will good? And who, on the contrary, here make the same free will able to will all good, nay, you thus make them to stand as nothing at all, unless with you the same words stand coldly useless and warmly useful at the same time, while they at once assert all things and deny all things? I wonder how any author can delight in repeating the same things so continually and to be as continually forgetting his subject design, unless perhaps distrusting his cause he wishes to overcome his adversaries by the bulk of his book, or to weary him out with the tedium and toil of reading it. By what conclusion, I ask, does it follow that will and power must immediately take place as often as it is said if thou wilt, if any one will, if thou shalt? Do we not most frequently imply in such expressions impotency, rather, and impossibility? For instance, if thou wilt equal Virgil in singing, my friend Mavius, thou must sing in another strain.

If thou wilt surpass Cicero, friend Scotus, instead of thy subtle jargon, thou must have the most exalted eloquence. If thou wilt stand in competition with David, thou must of necessity produce psalms like his. Here are plainly signified things impossible to our own powers, although by divine power all these things may be done.

So it is in the Scriptures that by such expressions it might be shown what we cannot do ourselves, but what can be done in us by the power of God. Moreover, if such expressions should be used in those things which are utterly impossible to be done, as being those which God would never do, then indeed they might rightly be called either coldly useless or ridiculous, because they would be spoken in vain. Whereas now they are so used that by them not only the impotency of free will is shown, by which no one of those things can be done, but it is also signified that a time will come when all those things shall be done, but by a power not our own, that is, by the divine power, provided that we fully admit that in such expressions there is a certain signification of things possible and to be done.

As if anyone should interpret them thus, if thou wilt keep the commandments, that is, if thou shalt at any time have the will to keep the commandments, though thou wilt have it not of thyself but of God, who giveth it to whom he will, they also shall preserve thee. But to take a wider scope, these expressions, especially those which are conditional, seem to be so placed also on account of the predestination of God and to involve that as being unknown to us. As if they should speak thus, if

thou desire, if thou wilt, that is, if thou be such with God that he shall deign to give thee this will to keep the commandments, thou shalt be saved.

According to which manner of speaking it is given us to understand both truths, that we can do nothing ourselves and that if we do anything God works that in us. This is what I would say to those who will not be content to have it said that by these words our impotency only is shown and who will contend that there is also proved a certain power and ability to do those things which are commanded. And in this way it will also appear to be truth that we are not able to do any of the things which are commanded and yet that we are able to do them all, that is, speaking of the former with reference to our own powers and of the latter with reference to the grace of God.

Section 69 The third particular that moves the diatribe is this. How there can be, it observes, any place for mere necessity there where mention is so frequently made of good works and of bad works and where there is mention made of reward I cannot understand for neither nature nor necessity can have merit. Nor can I understand anything but this that that probable opinion asserts mere necessity where it affirms that free will cannot will anything good and yet nevertheless here attributes to it even merit.

Hence, free will gains ground so fast as the book and argumentation of the diatribe increases that now it not only has an endeavor and desire of its own though not by its own powers nay, not only wills good and does good but also merits eternal life according to that saying of Christ Matthew 5 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven. Your reward that is the reward of free will for the diatribe so understands this passage that Christ and the Spirit of God are nothing for what need is there of them if we have good works and merit by free will. I say these things that we may see that it is no rare thing for men of exalted talent to be blind in a matter which is plainly manifest even to one of a thick and uninformed understanding and that we may also see how weak arguments drawn from human authority are in divine things where the authority of God alone avails.

But we have here to speak upon two things first upon the precepts of the New Testament and next upon merit we shall touch upon each briefly having already spoken upon them more fully elsewhere. The New Testament properly consists of promises and exhortations even as the old properly consists of laws and threatenings for in the New Testament the gospel is preached which is nothing else than the word by which are offered unto us the Spirit grace and the remission of sins obtained for us by Christ crucified and all entirely free through the mere mercy of God the Father thus favoring us unworthy creatures who deserve damnation rather than anything else and then follow exhortations in order to animate those who are already justified and who have obtained mercy to be diligent in the fruits of the Spirit and of righteousness received to exercise themselves in charity and good works and to bear courageously the cross and all the other tribulations of this world. This is the whole sum of the New Testament but how little Erasmus understands of this matter is manifest from this it knows not how to make any distinction between the Old Testament and the New for it can see nothing anywhere but precepts by which men are formed to good manners only but what the new birth is the new creature regeneration and the whole work of the Spirit of all this it sees nothing whatever so that I am struck with wonder and astonishment that the man who has spent so much time and study upon these things should know so little about them this passage therefore rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven agrees

as well with free will as light does with darkness for Christ is there exhorting not free will but his apostles who were not only raised above free will in grace and justified but were stationed in the ministry of the word that is in the highest degree of grace to endure the tribulations of the world but we are now disputing about free will and that particularly as it is without grace which by laws and threats or the old testament is instructed in the knowledge of itself only that it might flee to the promises presented to it in the new testament section 70 as to merit or a proposed reward what is it else but a certain promise but that promise does not prove that we can do anything it proves nothing more than this if anyone shall do this thing or that he shall then have a reward whereas our subject inquiry is not what reward is to be given or how it is to be given but whether or not we can do those things for the doing of which the reward is to be given this is the point to be settled and proved would not these be ridiculous conclusions the prize is set before all that run in the race therefore all can so run as to obtain if tsar shall conquer the turks he shall gain the kingdom of syria therefore tsar can conquer and does conquer the turks if free will shall gain dominion over sin it shall be holy before the lord therefore free will is holy before the lord but away with things so stupid and openly absurd except that free will deserves to be proved what it is by arguments so excellent let us rather speak to this point that necessity has neither merit nor reward if we speak of the necessity of compulsion it is true if we speak of the necessity of immutability it is false for who would bestow a reward upon or ascribe merit to an unwilling workman but with respect to those who do good or evil willingly even though they cannot alter that necessity by their own power the reward or punishment follows naturally and necessarily as it is written thou shalt render unto every man according to his works proverbs 24 12 it naturally follows if thou remain under water thou wilt be suffocated if thou swim out thou will be saved to be brief as it respects merit or reward you must speak either of the worthiness or of the consequence if you speak of the worthiness there is no merit no reward for if free will cannot of itself will good but wills good by grace alone for we are speaking of free will apart from grace and inquiring into the power which properly belongs to each who does not see that good will merit and reward belong to grace alone here then again the diatribe descends from itself while it argues from merit the freedom of the will and with me against whom it fights it stands in the same condemnation as ever that is it's asserting that there is merit reward and liberty makes the same as ever directly against itself seeing that it asserted above that it could will nothing good and undertook to prove that assertion if you speak of the consequence there is nothing either good or evil which has not its reward and here arises an error that in speaking of merits and rewards we agitate opinions and questions concerning worthiness which has not existence when we ought to be disputing concerning consequences for there remains as a necessary consequence the judgment of god and a hell for the wicked even though they themselves neither conceive nor think of such a reward for their sins nay they utterly detest it and as peter saith execrate it second peter 2 10 through 14 in the same manner there remains a kingdom for the just even though they themselves neither seek it nor think of it seeing that it was prepared for them by their father not only before they themselves existed but before the foundation of the world nay if they should work good in order to obtain the kingdom they never would obtain it but would be numbered rather with the wicked who with an evil and mercenary eye seek the things of self even in god whereas the sons of god do good with a free will seeking no reward but the glory and will of god only ready to do good even if which is impossible there were neither a kingdom nor a hell these things are i believe sufficiently confirmed even from that saying of christ only which i have just cited matthew 25 34 come ye blessed of my father receive the kingdom

which was prepared for you from the foundation of the world how can they merit that which is theirs and prepared for them before they had ever existed so that we might much more rightly say the kingdom of god merits us its possessors and thus place the merit where these place the reward and the reward where these place the merit for the kingdom is not merited but before prepared and the sons of the kingdom are before prepared for the kingdom but do not merit the kingdom for themselves that is the kingdom merits the sons not sons the kingdom so also hell more properly merits and prepares its sons seeing that christ saith depart ye cursed into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels matthew 25 41 section 71 but says the diatribe what then mean all those scriptures which promise a kingdom and threaten hell why is the word reward so often repeated in the scriptures as thou hast thy reward i am thy exceeding great reward again who rendereth unto every man according to his work and paul romans 2 6 who by patient continuance and well-doing seeks for eternal life and many of the same kind romans 2 6 and 7 it is answered by all these passages the consequence of reward is proved and nothing else but by no means the worthiness of merit seeing that those who do good do it not from a servile and mercenary principle in order to obtain eternal life but they seek eternal life that is they are in that way in which they shall come unto and find eternal life so that seeking is striving with desire and pursuing with ardent diligence that which always leads unto eternal life and the reason why it is declared in the scriptures that those things shall follow and take place after a good or bad life is that men might be instructed admonished awakened and terrified for as by the law is the knowledge of sin romans 3 20 and an admonition of our impotency and as from that it cannot be inferred that we can do anything ourselves so by these promises and threats there is conveyed an admonition by which we are taught what will follow sin and that impotency made known by the law but there is not by them anything of worthiness ascribed unto our merit wherefore as the words of the law are for instruction and illumination to teach us what we ought to do and also what we are not able to do so the words of reward while they signify what will be hereafter are for exhortation and threatening by which the just are animated comforted and raised up to go forward to persevere and to conquer that they might not be wearied or disheartened either in doing good or in enduring evil as paul exhorts his corinthians saying be ye steadfast knowing that your labor is not in vain in the lord first corinthians 15 58 so also god supports abraham saying i am thy exceeding great reward genesis 15 1 just as in the same manner as you would console anyone by signifying to him that his works certainly pleased god which kind of consolation the scripture frequently uses nor is it a small consolation for anyone to know that he so pleases god that nothing but a good consequence can follow even though it seemed to him impossible section 72 do this point pertain all those words which are spoken concerning the hope and expectation that those things which we hope for will certainly come to pass for the pious do not hope because of these words themselves nor do they expect such things because they hope for them so also the wicked by the words of threatening and the future judgment are only terrified and cast down that they might cease and abstain from sin and not become proud secure and hardened in their sins but if reason should here turn up her nose and say why does god will these things to be done by his words when by such words nothing is affected and when the will can turn itself neither one way nor the other why does he not do what he does without the word when he can do all things without the word for the will is of no more power and does no more with the word if the spirit to move within be wanting nor is it of less power nor does it do less without the word if the spirit be present seeing that all depends upon the power and operation of the holy spirit i answer thus it pleases god not to give

the spirit without the word but through the word that he might have us as workers together with him while we sound forth in the word without what he alone works by the breath of his spirit within wheresoever it pleases him which nevertheless he could do without the word but such is not his will and who are we that we should inquire into the cause of the divine will it is enough for us to know that such is the will of god and it becomes us bridling the temerity of reason to reverence love and adore that will for christ matthew 11 25 and 26 gives no other reason why the gospel is hidden from the wise and revealed unto babes than this so it pleased the father in the same manner also he might nourish us without bread and indeed he has given a power which nourishes us without bread as matthew 4 4 saith man doth not live by bread alone but by the word of god but yet it hath pleased him to nourish us by his spirit within by means of the bread and instead of the bread used without it is certain therefore that merit cannot be proved from the reward at least out of the scriptures and that moreover free will cannot be proved from merit much less such a free will as the diatribe set out to prove that is which of itself cannot will anything good and even if you grant merit and add to it moreover those usual similitudes and conclusions of reason such as it is commanded in vain the reward is promised in vain threatenings are denounced in vain if there be no free will all these i say if they prove anything prove this that free will can of itself do all things but if it cannot of itself do all things then that conclusion of reason still remains therefore the precepts are given in vain the promises are made in vain and the threatenings are denounced in vain thus the diatribe is perpetually arguing against itself as often as it attempts to argue against me for god alone by his spirit works in us both merit and reward but he makes known and declares each by his external word to the whole world to the intent that his power and glory and our impotency and vileness might be proclaimed even among the wicked the unbelieving and the ignorant although those alone who fear god receive these things into their heart and keep them faithfully the rest despise them section 73 it would be too tedious to repeat here each imperative passage which the diatribe enumerates out of the new testament always tacking to them her own conclusions and vainly arguing that those things which are so said are to no purpose are superfluous are coldly useless are ridiculous are nothing at all if the will be not free and i have already repeatedly observed even to disgust that nothing whatever is affected by such arguments and that if anything be proved the whole of free will is proved and this is nothing less than overthrowing the diatribe altogether seeing that it set out to prove such a free will as cannot of itself do good but serve sin and then goes on to prove such a free will as can do all things thus throughout forgetting and not knowing itself it is mere cavillation where it makes these remarks by their fruits saith the lord ye shall know them matthew 7 16 and 20 he calls works fruits and he calls them ours but they are not ours if all things are done by necessity i pray you are not those things most rightly called ours which we did not indeed make ourselves but which we received from others why should not those works be called ours which god has given unto us by his spirit shall we then not call christ ours because we did not make him but only received him again if we made all those things which are called ours therefore we made our own eyes we made our own hands we made our own feet unless you mean to say that our eyes our hands and our feet are not called our own nay what have we that we did not receive saith paul first corinthians 4 7 shall we then say that those things are either not ours or else we made them ourselves but suppose they are called our fruits because we made them where then remains grace and spirit nor does he say by their fruits which are in a certain small part their own ye shall know them this cavillation rather is ridiculous superfluous to no purpose coldly useless nay absurd and detestable by which the holy

words of god are defiled and profaned in the same way also is that saying of christ upon the cross trifled with father forgive them for they know not what they do luke 23 34 here where some assertion might have been expected which should make for free will recourse is again had to conclusions how much more rightly says the diatribe would he have excused them on this ground because they have not a free will nor can they if they willed it do otherwise no nor is that free will which cannot will anything good concerning which we are disputing proved by this conclusion either but that free will is proved by which it can do all things concerning which no one disputes to accept the pelagians here where christ openly saith they know not what they do does he not testify that they could not will good for how can you will that which you do not know you certainly cannot desire that of which you know nothing what more forcible can be advanced against free will than that it is such a thing of not that it not only cannot will good but cannot even know what evil it does and what good it does is there then any obscurity in this saying they know not what they do what is there remaining in the scriptures which may not upon authority of the diatribe declare for free will since this word of christ is made to declare for it which is so clearly and so directly against it in the same easy way anyone might affirm that this word declares for free will and the earth was without form and void genesis 1 2 or this and god rested on the seventh day genesis 2 2 or any word of the same kind then indeed the scriptures would be obscure and ambiguous nay would be nothing at all but to dare to make use of the scriptures in this way argues a mind that is in a signal manner a contemner both of god and man and that deserves no forbearance whatever section 74 again the diatribe receives that word of john 1 12 to them gave he power to become the sons of god thus how can there be power given unto them to become the sons of god if there be no liberty in our will this word also is a hammer that beats down free will as is nearly the whole of the evangelist john and yet even this is brought forward in support of free will let us i pray you just look into this word john is not speaking concerning any work of man either great or small but concerning the very renewal and transformation of the old man who is a son of the devil into the new man who is a son of god this man is merely passive as the term is used nor does he do anything but is wholly made and john is speaking of being made he saith we are made the sons of god by a power given unto us from above not by the power of free will inherent in ourselves whereas our friend diatribe here concludes that free will is of so much power that it makes us the sons of god if not it is prepared to aver that the word of john is ridiculous and stands coldly useless but whoever so exalted free will as to assign unto it the power of making us the sons of god especially such a free will as cannot even will good which free will it is and that the diatribe has taken upon itself to establish but let this conclusion be gone after the rest which have been so often repeated by which nothing else is proved if anything be proved at all than that which the diatribe denies that free will can do all things the meaning of john is this that by the coming of christ into the world by his gospel by which grace was offered but not works required a full opportunity was given to all men of becoming the sons of god if they would believe but as to this willing and this believing on his name as free will never knew it nor thought of it before so much less could it then do it of its own power for how could reason then think that faith in jesus as the son of god and man was necessary when even at this day it could neither receive nor believe it though the whole creation should cry out together there is a certain person who is both god and man nay it is rather offended at such a saying as paul affirms first corinthians 1 17-31 so far is it from possibility that it should either will it or believe it john therefore is preaching not the power of free will but the riches of the kingdom of god offered to the world by the gospel and signifying at the same time how few there are who receive it that is from

the enmity of the free will against it the power of which is nothing else than this satan reigning over it and causing it to reject grace and the spirit which fulfill the law so excellently do its endeavor and desire avail unto the fulfilling of the law but we shall hereafter show more fully what a thunderbolt this passage of john is against free will yet i am not a little astonished that passages which make so signally and so forcibly against free will are brought forward by the diatribe in support of free will whose stupidity is such that it makes no distinction whatever between the promises and the words of the law for it most ridiculously sets up free will by the words of the law and far more absurdly still confirms it by the words of the promise but how this absurdity is may be immediately solved if it be but considered with what an unconcerned and contemptuous mind the diatribe is here disputing with whom it matters not whether grace stand or fall whether free will lie prostrate or sit in state if it can but by words of vanity serve the turn of tyrants to the odium of the cause section 75 after this it comes to paul also the most determined enemy to free will and even he is dragged in to confirm free will or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and patience and long-suffering not knowing that the goodness of god leadeth to repentance romans 2 4 how says the diatribe can the despising of the commandment be imputed where there is not a free will how can god invite to repentance who is the author of impenitence how can the damnation be just where the judge compels unto evildoing i answer let the diatribe see to these questions itself what are they unto us the diatribe said according to that probable opinion that free will cannot will good and is of necessity compelled to serve sin how therefore can the despising of the commandment be charged on the will if it cannot will good and has no liberty but is necessarily compelled to the service of sin how can god invite to repentance who is the author of the reason why it cannot repent while it leaves or does not leave grace to that which cannot of itself will good how can the damnation be just where the judge by taking away his aid compels the wicked man to be left in his wickedness who cannot of his own power do otherwise all these conclusions therefore recoil back upon the head of the diatribe or if they prove anything as i said they prove that free will can do all things which however is denied by the diatribe and by all thus these conclusions of reason torment the diatribe throughout all the passages of scripture seeing that it must appear ridiculous and coldly useless to enforce and exact with so much vehemence when there is no one to be found who can perform for the apostle's intent is by means of these threats to bring the impious and proud to a knowledge of themselves and of their impotency that he might prepare them for grace when humbled by the knowledge of sin and what need is there to speak of singly all those parts which are brought forward out of paul seeing that they are only a collection of imperative or conditional passages or of those by which paul exhorts christians to the fruits of faith whereas the diatribe by its appended conclusions forms to itself a power of free will such and so great which can without grace do all things which paul in his exhortations prescribes christians however are not led by free will but by the spirit of god romans 8 14 and to be led is not to lead but to be impelled as a saw or an axe is impelled by a carpenter and that no one might doubt whether or not luther asserts things so absurd the diatribe recites his own words which indeed i acknowledge for i confess that that article of wickliffe all things take place from necessity that is from the immutable will of god and our will is not compelled indeed but it cannot of itself do good was falsely condemned by the council of constance or that conspiracy or cabal rather nay the diatribe itself defends the same together with me while it asserts that free will cannot by its own power will anything good and that it of necessity serves sin although in furnishing this defense it all the while designs the direct contrary suffice it to have spoken thus in reply to the first part of the diatribe in

which it has endeavored to establish free will let us now consider the latter part in which our arguments are refuted that is those by which free will is utterly overthrown here you will see what the smoke of man can do against the thunder and lightning of god end of section 75

## 07 - Sections 76-90: Discussion, Part II-a

---

Sections 76 through 90 of *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther, translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain. Discussion, second part.

Section 76. The diatribe having thus first cited numberless passages of Scripture, as it were, a most formidable army of support of free will, in order that it might inspire courage into the confessors and martyrs, the men saints and women saints on the side of free will, and strike terror into all the fearful and trembling deniers of, and transgressors against free will, imagines to itself a poor, contemptible handful only standing up to oppose free will. And therefore it brings forward no more than two Scriptures, which seem to be more prominent than the rest, to stand up on their side, intent only upon slaughter, and that to be executed without much trouble.

The one of these passages is from Exodus 9.13, the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh. The other is from Malachi 1.2-3, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. Paul has explained at large both these passages in the Romans 9.11-17, but according to the judgment of the diatribe, what a detestable and useless discussion has he made of it.

So that, did not the Holy Spirit know a little something of rhetoric, there would be some danger, lest being broken at the outset by such an artfully managed show of contempt, he should despair of his cause, and open the yield to free will before the sound of the trumpet for the battle. But, however, I, as a recruit taken into the rear of those two passages, will display the forces on our side. Although, where the state of the battle is such that one can put to flight ten thousand, there is no need of forces.

If therefore one passage shall defeat free will, its numberless forces will profit at nothing. Section 77. In this part of the discussion, then, the diatribe has found out a new way of eluding the most clear passages.

That is, it will have that there is in the most simple and clear passages a trope. And, as before, when speaking in defense of free will, it eluded all the imperative and conditional sentences of the law by means of conclusions, tact, and similitudes added to them. So, now, where it designs to speak against us, it twists all the words of the divine promise and declaration just which way it pleases, by means of a trope which it has invented, thus being everywhere an incomprehensible proteus.

Nay, it demands with a haughty brow that this permission should be granted it, saying that we ourselves, when pressed closely, are accustomed to get off by means of invented tropes, as in these instances, On which thou wilt stretch forth thine hand. Exodus 8.5 That is, grace shall extend thine hand on which it will. Make you a new heart.

Ezekiel 18.31 That is, grace shall make you a new heart, and the like. It seems, therefore, an indignity offered, that Luther should be allowed to give forth an interpretation so forced and twisted, and that it should not be far more allowable to follow the interpretations of the most

approved doctors. You see, then, that here the contention is not for the text itself, no, nor for conclusions and similitudes, but for tropes and interpretations.

When, then, shall we ever have any plain and pure text, without tropes and conclusions, either for or against free will? Has the Scriptures no such texts anywhere? And shall the cause of free will remain forever in doubt, like a reed shaken with the wind, as being that which can be supported by no certain text, but which stands upon conclusions and tropes only introduced by men mutually disagreeing with each other? But let our sentiment rather be this, that neither conclusion nor trope is to be admitted into the Scriptures, unless the evident strife of the particulars, or the absurdity of any particular as militating against an article of faith, require it. But that the simple, pure, and natural meaning of the words is to be adhered to, which is according to the rules of grammar, and to that common use of speech which God has given unto men, for if every one be allowed, according to his own lust, to invent conclusions and tropes in the Scriptures, what will the whole Scripture together be, but a reed shaken with the wind, or a kind of vertumness? Then, in truth, nothing could, to a certainty, be determined on or proved concerning any one article of the faith, which you might not subject to cavillation by means of some trope. But every trope ought to be avoided as the most deadly poison, which is not absolutely required by the Scriptures itself.

See what happened to that trope-inventor Origen, in expounding the Scriptures? What just occasion did he give the columniator Porphyry, to say those who favor Origen can be no great friends of Hieronymus? What happened to the Arians by means of the trope, according to which they made Christ God nominally? What happened in our own times to those new prophets concerning the words of Christ, This is my body? One invented a trope in the word This, another in the word Is, another in the word Body. I have therefore observed this, that all heresies and errors in the Scriptures have not arisen from the simplicity of the words, as is the general report throughout the world, but from men not attending to the simplicity of the words, and hatching tropes and conclusions out of their own brain. For example, On whichsoever thou wilt stretch forth thine hand, I, as far as I can remember, never put upon these words so violent an interpretation as to say Grace shall extend thine hand on whichsoever it will.

Make yourselves a new heart, that is, Grace shall make you a new heart, and the like, although the diatribe produces me thus, in a public work, from being so carried away with and eluded by its own tropes and conclusions that it knows not what it says about anything. But I said this, that by the words Stretch forth thine hand, simply taken as they are, without tropes or conclusions, nothing else is signified than what is required of us in the stretching forth of our hand, and what we ought to do, according to the nature of an imperative expression with grammarians, and in the common use of speech. But the diatribe, not attending to this simplicity of the word, but with violent seducing conclusions and tropes, interprets the words thus, Stretch forth thine hand, that is, thou art able by thine own power to stretch forth thine hand.

Make you a new heart, that is, you are able to make a new heart. Believe in Christ, that is, you are able to believe in Christ. So that with it, what is spoken imperatively and what is spoken indicatively is the same thing, or else it is prepared to aver that the Scripture is ridiculous and to no purpose.

And these interpretations which no grammarian will bear must not be called in theologians violent or invented, but the productions of the most approved doctors received by so many ages. But it is

easy for the diatribe to admit and follow tropes in this part of the discussion, seeing that it cares not at all whether what is said be certain or uncertain. Nay, it aims at making all things uncertain, for its design is that the doctrines concerning free will should be left alone rather than searched into.

Therefore it is enough for it to be enabled in any way to avoid those passages by which it finds itself closely pressed. But as for me, who am maintaining a serious cause and who am inquiring what is to the greatest certainty the truth, for the establishing of consciences, I must act very differently. For me, I say, it is not enough that you say there may be a trope here, but I must inquire whether there ought to be or can be a trope there.

For if you cannot prove that there must of necessity be a trope in that passage, you will affect nothing at all. There stands there this word of God, I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, Exodus 4.21, Romans 9, 17-18. If you say that it can be understood or ought to be understood thus, I will permit it to be hardened.

I hear you say indeed that it may be so understood. And I hear this trope used by everyone. I destroyed you because I did not correct you immediately when you began to do wrong.

But here there is no place for that interpretation. We are not here inquiring whether that trope be in use. We are not inquiring whether anyone can use it in that passage of Paul.

But this is the point of inquiry, whether or not it be sure and safe to use this passage plainly as it stands, and whether Paul would have it so used. We are not inquiring into the use of an indifferent reader of this passage, but into the use of the author, Paul himself. What will you do with a conscience inquiring thus? Behold God, as the author, saith, I will harden the heart of Pharaoh.

The meaning of the word harden is plain and well known. But a man who reads this passage tells me that in this place, to harden, signifies to give an occasion of becoming hardened, because the sinner is not immediately corrected. But by what authority does he this? With what design, by what necessity, is the natural signification of this passage thus twisted? And suppose the reader and interpreter should be in error.

How shall it be proved that such a turn ought to be given to this passage? It is dangerous, nay impious, thus to twist the word of God without necessity and without authority. Would you then comfort a poor soul thus laboring in this way? Origen thought so and so. Cease to search into such things, because they are curious and superfluous.

But he would answer you, This admonition should have been given to Moses or Paul before they wrote, and so also to God himself. For it is they who vex us with these curious and superfluous scriptures. Section 78 This miserable scapegoat of tropes, therefore, profits the diatribe nothing.

But this proteus of ours must here be held fast and compelled to satisfy us fully concerning the trope in this passage, and that by scriptures the most clear or by miracles the most evident. For as to its mere opinion, even though supported by the labored industry of all ages, we give no credit to that whatever. But we urge on and press it home that there can be here no trope whatever, but that the word of God is to be understood according to the plain meaning of the words.

For it is not given unto us, as the diatribe persuades itself, to turn the words of God backwards and forwards according to our own lust. If that were the case, what is there in the whole scripture that

might not be resolved into the philosophy of Anaxagoras, that anything might be made from anything? And thus I will say, God created the heavens and the earth, that is, he stationed them, but did not make them out of nothing. Or he created the heavens and the earth, that is, the angels and the devils.

Or the just and the wicked. Who, I ask, if this were the case, might not become a theologian at the first opening of a book? Let this therefore be a fixed and settled point, that since the diatribe cannot prove that there is a trope in these, our passages which it utterly destroys, it is compelled to cede to us that the words are to be understood according to their plain meaning, even though it should prove that the same trope is contained in all the other passages of scripture and used in common by everyone. And by the gaining of this one point, all our arguments are at the same time defended, which the diatribe designed to refute.

And thus its refutation is found to affect nothing, to do nothing, to be nothing. Whenever therefore this passage of Moses, I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, is interpreted thus, my long-suffering by which I bear with the sinner leads indeed others unto repentance, but it shall render Pharaoh more hardened in iniquity. It is a pretty interpretation, but it is not proved that it ought to be so interpreted.

But I am not content with what is said, I must have the proof. And that also of Paul, he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will harden he hardeneth, Romans 9.18, is plausibly interpreted thus, that is, God hardens when he does not immediately punish the sinner, and he has mercy when he immediately invites to repentance by afflictions. But how is this interpretation proved? And also that of Isaiah 63.17, Why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and harden our heart from thy fear? Be it so that Jerome interprets it thus from Origen, He is said to make to err who does not immediately recall from error.

But who shall certify us that Jerome and Origen interpret rightly? It is therefore a settled determination with me not to argue upon the authority of any teacher whatever, but upon that of the Scripture alone. What Origen's and Jerome's does the diatribe then, forgetting its own determination, set before us? Especially when, among all the ecclesiastical writers, there are scarcely any who have handled the Holy Scriptures less to the purpose, and more absurdly, than Origen and Jerome. In a word, this liberty of interpretation, by a new and unheard-of kind of grammar, goes to confound all things, so that when God saith, I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, you are to change the persons, and understand it thus, Pharaoh hardens himself by my long-suffering.

God hardeneth our hearts, that is, we harden ourselves by God's deferring the punishment. Thou, O Lord, hast made us to err, that is, we have made ourselves to err by thy not punishing us. So also, God's having mercy no longer signifies his giving grace, or showing mercy, or forgiving sin, or justifying, or delivering from evil, but, on the contrary, signifies bringing on evil and punishing.

In fact, by these tropes matters will come to this. You may say that God had mercy upon the children of Israel when he sent them into Assyria, and to Babylon, because he there punished the sinners, and there invited them by afflictions to repentance. And that, on the other hand, when he delivered them and brought them back, he had not then mercy upon them, but hardened them.

That is, by his long suffering and mercy he gave them an occasion of becoming hardened. And also, God's sending the Savior Christ into the world will not be said to be the mercy, but the hardening of God, because by this mercy he gave men an occasion of hardening themselves. On the other hand, his destroying Jerusalem and scattering the Jews even unto this day is his having mercy on them, because he punishes the sinners and invites them to repentance.

Moreover, his carrying the saints away into heaven on the day of judgment will not be in mercy, but in hardening, because by his long suffering he will give them an occasion of abusing it, but his thrusting the wicked down to hell will be his mercy, because he punishes the sinners. Who, I pray you, ever heard of such examples of the mercy and wrath of God as these? And be it so, that good men are made better both by the long suffering and by the severity of God, yet, when we are speaking of the good and the bad promiscuously, these tropes, by an utter perversion of the common manner of speaking, will make out of the mercy of God his wrath and his wrath out of his mercy, seeing that they call it the wrath of God when he does good and his mercy when he afflicts. Moreover, if God be said then to harden when he does good and endures with long suffering, and then to have mercy when he afflicts and punishes, why is he more particularly said to harden Pharaoh than to harden the children of Israel, or then the whole world? Did he not do good to the children of Israel? Does he not do good to the whole world? Does he not bear with the wicked? Does he not reign upon the evil and upon the good? Why is he rather said to have mercy upon the children of Israel than upon Pharaoh? Did he not afflict the children of Israel in Egypt and in the desert? And be it so, that some abuse and some rightly use the goodness and the wrath of God, yet, according to your definition, to harden is the same as to indulge the wicked by long suffering and goodness, and to have mercy is not to indulge, but to visit and punish.

Therefore, with reference to God, he by his continual goodness does nothing but harden, and by his perpetual punishment does nothing but show mercy. Section 79 But this is the most excellent statement of all, that God is said to harden when he indulges sinners by long suffering, but to have mercy upon them when he visits and afflicts, and thus by severity invites to repentance. What, I ask, did God leave undone in afflicting, punishing, and calling Pharaoh to repentance? Are there not in his dealings with him ten plagues recorded? If, therefore, your definitions stand good, that showing mercy is punishing and calling the sinner immediately, God certainly had mercy upon Pharaoh.

Why, then, does not God say, I will have mercy upon Pharaoh, whereas he saith, I will harden the heart of Pharaoh? For in the very act of having mercy upon him, that is, as you say, afflicting and punishing him, he saith, I will harden him, that is, as you say, I will bear with him and do him good. What can be heard of more enormous? Where are now your tropes? Where are your origins? Where are your Jerome's? Where are all your most approved doctors whom one poor creature Luther daringly contradicts? But at this rate, the flesh must unawares impel the man to talk who trifles with the words of God and believes not their solemn importance. The text of Moses itself, therefore, incontrovertibly proves that here these tropes are mere inventions and things of naught, and that by those words I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, something else is signified far different from and of greater importance than doing good or affliction and punishment.

Because we cannot deny that both were tried upon Pharaoh with the greatest care and concern. For what wrath and punishment could be more instant than his being stricken by so many wonders

and so many plagues that, as Moses himself testifies, the like had never been? Nay, even Pharaoh himself, repenting, was moved by them more than once. But he was not effectually moved, nor did he persevere.

And what longsuffering or goodness of God could be greater than his taking away the plagues so easily, hardening his sins so often, so often bringing back the good, and so often taking away the evil? Yet neither is of any avail. He still saith, I will harden the heart of Pharaoh. Ye see, therefore, that even if your hardening and mercy, that is, your glosses and tropes, be granted to the greatest extent, as supported by use and by example, and as seen in the case of Pharaoh, there is yet a hardening that still remains.

And that the hardening of which Moses speaks must of necessity be one, and that of which you dream another. Section 80 But since I have to fight with fiction framers and ghosts, let me turn to ghost-raising also. Let me suppose, which is an impossibility, that the trope of which the diatribe dreams avails in this passage.

In order that I may see which way the diatribe will elude the being compelled to declare that all things take place according to the will of God alone and from necessity in us, and how it will clear God from being himself the author and cause of our becoming hardened. For if it be true that God is then said to harden when he bears with longsuffering and does not immediately punish, these two positions still stand firm. First, that man nevertheless of necessity serves sin.

For when it is granted that free will cannot will anything good, which kind of free will the diatribe undertook to prove, then by the goodness of a longsuffering God it becomes nothing better, but of necessity worse. Wherefore, it still remains that all that we do is done from necessity. And next, that God appears to be just as cruel in this bearing with us by his longsuffering as he does by being preached, as willing to harden by that will inscrutable.

For when he sees that free will cannot will good, but becomes worse by his enduring with longsuffering, by this very longsuffering he appears to be most cruel, and to delight in our miseries, seeing that he could remedy them if he willed, and might not thus endure with longsuffering if he willed, nay, that he could not thus endure unless he willed. For who can compel him against his will? That will, therefore, without which nothing is done, being admitted, and it being admitted also that free will cannot will anything good, all is advanced in vain that is advanced, either in excusation of God or in accusation of free will. For the language of free will is ever this, I cannot, and God will not.

What can I do? If he have mercy upon me by affliction, I shall be nothing benefited, but must of necessity become worse unless he give me his spirit. But this he gives me not, though he might give it me if he willed. It is certain, therefore, that he wills not to give.

Section 81 Nor do the similitudes adduced make anything to the purpose where it is said by the diatribe, As under the same sun mud is hardened and wax melted, as by the same shower the cultivated earth brings forth fruit and the uncultivated earth thorns, so by the same longsuffering of God some are hardened and some converted. For we are not now dividing free will into two different natures and making the one like mud, the other like wax, the one like cultivation, the one like cultivated earth, the other like uncultivated earth. But we are speaking concerning that one free will equally impotent in all men, which, as it cannot will good, is nothing but mud, nothing but

uncultivated earth.

Nor does Paul say that God, as the potter, makes one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor out of different kinds of clay, but he saith out of the same lump and so forth. Romans 9.21 Therefore, as mud always becomes harder, and uncultivated earth always becomes more thorny, even so free will always becomes worse, both under the hardening sun of longsuffering and under the softening shower of rain. If, therefore, free will be of one and the same nature and impotency in all men, no reason can be given why it should attain unto grace in one and not in another.

If nothing else free will must be preached to all but the goodness of a longsuffering and the punishment of a mercy-showing God. For it is a granted position that free will in all is alike defined to be that which cannot will good. And indeed, if it were not so, God could not elect anyone, nor would there be any place left for election, but for free will only as choosing or refusing the longsuffering and anger of God.

And if God be thus robbed of His power and wisdom to elect, what will there be remaining but that idle fortune, under the name of which all things take place at random? Nay, we shall at length come to this, that men may be saved and damned without God's knowing anything at all about it, as not having determined by certain election who should be saved and who should be damned, but having set before all men in general His hardening goodness and longsuffering and His mercy-showing correction and punishment, and left them to choose for themselves whether they would be saved or damned, while He, in the meantime, should be gone, as Homer says, to an Ethiopian feast. It is just such a God as this that Aristotle paints out to us, that is, who sleeps Himself and leaves everyone to use or abuse His longsuffering and punishment just as He will. Nor can reason of Herself form any other judgment than the diatribe here does.

For as She Herself snores over and looks with contempt upon divine things, She thinks, concerning God, that He sleeps and snores over them too, not exercising His wisdom, will, and presence in choosing, separating, and inspiring, but leaving the troublesome and irksome business of accepting or refusing His longsuffering and His anger entirely to men. This is what we come to when we attempt by human reason to limit and make excuses for God, not revering the secrets of His Majesty, but curiously prying into them, being lost in the glory of them, instead of making one excuse for God, we pour forth a thousand blasphemies. And forgetting ourselves, we pray like madmen, both against God and against ourselves, when we are all the while supposing that we are with a great deal of wisdom, speaking both for God and for ourselves.

Here then you see what that trope and gloss of the diatribe will make of God, and moreover how excellently consistent the diatribe is with itself, which before, by its one definition, made free will one and the same in all men, and now, in the course of its argumentation, forgetting its own definition, makes one free will to be cultivated and the other uncultivated, according to the difference of works, of manners, and of men, thus making two different free wills, the one that which cannot do good, the other that which can do good, and that by its own powers before grace, whereas its former definition declared that it could not by those its own powers will anything good whatever. Hence, therefore, comes to pass that while we do not ascribe unto the will of God only the will and power of hardening, showing mercy, and doing all things, we ascribe unto free will itself the power of doing all things without grace, which, nevertheless, we declared to be unable to do any good whatever without grace. The similitudes, therefore, of the sun and of the shower

make nothing at all to the purpose.

The Christian would use those similitudes more rightly if he were to make the sun and the shower to represent the gospel, as Psalm 19 does, and as does also Hebrews 6, 7, and were to make the cultivated earth to represent the elect, and the uncultivated the reprobate. For the former are by the word edified and made better, while the latter are offended and made worse. Or, if this distinction be not made, then, as to free will itself, that is, in all men, uncultivated earth and the kingdom of Satan.

But let us now inquire into the reason why this trope was invented in this passage. It appears absurd, says the diatribe, that God, who is not only just but also good, should be said to have hardened the heart of a man in order that by his iniquity he might show forth his own power. The same also occurred to Origen, who confesses that the occasion of becoming hardened was given of God, but throws all the fault upon Pharaoh.

He has, moreover, made a remark upon that which the Lord saith, For this very purpose have I raised thee up. He does not say, he observes, For this very purpose have I made thee. Otherwise, Pharaoh could not have been wicked if God had made him such in one as he was.

For God beheld all his works and they were very good. Thus the diatribe. It appears, then, that one of the principal causes why the words of Moses and of Paul are not received is their absurdity.

But against what article of faith does that absurdity militate, or who is offended at it? It is human reason that is offended, who, being blind, deaf, impious, and sacrilegious in all the words and works of God, is, in the case of this passage, introduced as a judge of the words and works of God. According to the same argument of absurdity, you will deny all the articles of faith, because it is of all things the most absurd and, as Paul saith, foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews that God should be a man, the son of a virgin, crucified, and sitting at the right hand of his father. It is, I say, absurd to believe such things.

Therefore, let us invent some tropes with the Arians and say that Christ is not truly God. Let us invent some tropes with the Maniches and say that he is not truly man, but a phantom introduced by means of a virgin, or a reflection conveyed by glass which fell and was crucified. And in this way we shall handle the Scriptures to excellent purpose indeed.

After all, then, the tropes amount to nothing, nor is the absurdity avoided, for it still remains absurd, according to the judgment of reason, that God, who is just and good, should exact of free will impossibilities, and that when free will cannot will good and of necessity serve sin, that sin should yet be laid to its charge, and that, moreover, when he does not give the Spirit, he should nevertheless act so severely and unmercifully as to harden or permit to become hardened. These things reason will still say are not becoming of God good and merciful. Thus they, too, far exceed her capacity, nor can she so bring herself into subjection as to believe and judge that the God who does such things is good.

But, setting aside faith, she wants to feel out and see and comprehend how he can be good and not cruel. But she will comprehend that when this shall be said of God, he hardens no one, he damns no one, but he has mercy upon all, he saves all, and he has so utterly destroyed hell that no future punishment need be dreaded. It is thus that reason blusters and contends in attempting

to clear God and to defend him as just and good.

But faith and the Spirit judge otherwise, who believe that God would be good even though he should destroy all men. And to what profit is it to weary ourselves with all these reasonings in order that we might throw the fault of hardening upon free will? Let all the free will in the world do all it can with all its powers, and yet it never will give one proof, either that it can avoid being hardened where God gives not his Spirit, or merit mercy where it is left to its own powers. And what does it signify whether it be hardened or deserve being hardened if the hardening be of necessity as long as it remains in that impotency in which, according to the testimony of the diatribe, it cannot will good? Since, therefore, the absurdity is not taken out of the way by these tropes, or if it be taken out of the way, greater absurdities still are introduced into the world in their stead, and all things are ascribed unto free will.

Away with such useless and seducing tropes, and let us cleave close to the pure and simple word of God. As to the other point, that those things which God has made are very good, and that God did not say, For this purpose have I made thee, but, For this purpose have I raised thee up. I observe, first of all, that this, Genesis 1, concerning the works of God being very good, was said before the fall of man, but it is recorded directly after in Genesis 3 how man became evil when God departed from him and left him to himself.

And from this one man, thus corrupt, all the wicked were born. And Pharaoh also, as Paul saith, We were all, by nature, the children of wrath, even as others, Ephesians 2, 8. Therefore God made Pharaoh wicked, that is, from a wicked and corrupt seed, as he saith in the Proverbs of Solomon, 16.4. God hath made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil, that is, not by creating evil in them, but by forming them out of a corrupt seed and ruling over them. This, therefore, is not a just conclusion.

God made man wicked, therefore he is not wicked. For how can he not be wicked from a wicked seed? As Psalm 51, 5 saith, Behold, I was conceived in sin, and Job, 14, 4. Who can make that clean which is conceived from unclean seed? For although God did not make sin, yet he ceases not to form and multiply that nature, which from the spirit being withdrawn is defiled by sin. And as it is when a carpenter makes statues of corrupt wood, so such as the nature is, such are the men made when God creates and forms them out of that nature.

Again, if you understand the words they were very good, as referring to the works of God after the fall, you will be pleased to observe that this was said not with reference to us, but with reference to God. For it is not said, Man saw all the things that God had made, and behold, they were very good. Many things seem very good unto God and are very good, which seem unto us very evil, and are considered to be very evil.

Thus, afflictions, evils, errors, hell, nay, all the very best works of God are in the sight of the world very evil, and even damnable. What is better than Christ and the gospel, but what is more execrated by the world? And therefore, how those things are good in the sight of God, which are evil in our sight, is known only unto God and unto those who see with the eyes of God, that is, who have the spirit. But there is no need of argumentation so close as this.

The preceding answer is sufficient. Section 84 But here, perhaps, it will be asked, How can God be said to work evil in us in the same way as he is said to harden us, to give us up to our own

desires, to cause us to err, and so forth? We ought, to be content with the word of God and simply to believe what that sayeth, seeing that the works of God are utterly unspeakable. But, however, in compliance with reason, that is, human foolery, I will just act the fool and the stupid fellow for once, and try, by a little babbling, if I can produce any effect upon her.

First, then, both reason and the diatribe grant that God works all in all, and that without him nothing is either done or effective because he is omnipotent and because, all things come under his omnipotence as Paul sayeth to the Ephesians. Now, then, Satan and man being fallen and left of God cannot will good, that is, those things which please God or which God wills, but are ever turned to the way of their own desires so that they cannot but seek their own. This, therefore, their will and nature so turned from God cannot be a nothing, nor are Satan and the wicked man a nothing, nor are the nature and the will which they have a nothing, although it be a nature corrupt and averse.

That remnant of nature, therefore, in Satan and the wicked man of which we speak, as being the creature and work of God is not less subject to the divine omnipotence and action than all the rest of the creatures and works of God. Since, therefore, God moves and does all in all, he necessarily moves and does all in Satan and the wicked man. But he so does all in them as they themselves are and as he finds them, that is, as they are themselves averse and evil.

Being carried along by that motion of the divine omnipotence, they cannot but do what is averse and evil. Just as it is with a man driving a lame horse on one foot or lame on two feet, he drives him just so as the horse himself is, that is, the horse moves badly. But what can the man do? He is driving along this kind of horse together with sound horses.

He, indeed, goes badly and the rest well. But it cannot be otherwise unless the horse be made sound. Here, then, you see, that when God works in and by evil men, the evils themselves are in wrought.

But yet, God cannot do evil, although he thus works the evils by evil men. Because, being good himself, he cannot do evil. But he uses evil instruments which cannot escape the sway and motion of his omnipotence.

The fault, is in the instruments which God allows not to remain actionless, seeing that the evils are done as God himself moves, just in the same manner as a carpenter would cut badly with a saw-edged or broken-edged axe. Hence it is that the wicked man cannot but always err and sin, because being carried along by the motion of the divine omnipotence, he is not permitted to remain motionless, but must will, desire, and act according to his nature. All this is fixed certainty if we believe that God is omnipotent.

It is, moreover, as certain that the wicked man is the creature of God, though, being averse and left to himself without the spirit of God, he cannot will or do good. For the omnipotence of God makes it that the wicked man cannot evade the motion and action of God, but, being of necessity subject to it, he yields, though his corruption and aversion to God makes him that he cannot be carried along and moved unto good. God cannot suspend his omnipotence on account of his aversion, nor can the wicked man change his aversion.

Wherefore, it is, that he must continue of necessity to sin and err until he be amended by the spirit of God. Meanwhile, in all these things, Satan goes on to reign in peace and keeps his palace undisturbed under this motion of the divine omnipotence. But now follows the act itself of hardening, which is thus, the wicked man, as we have said, like his prince Satan, is turned totally the way of selfishness and his own.

He seeks not God, nor cares for the things of God. He seeks his own riches, his own glory, his own doings, his own wisdom, his own power, and, in a word, his own kingdom, and wills only to enjoy them in peace. And if any one oppose him or wish to diminish any of these things with the same aversion to God under which he seeks these, with the same he is moved, enraged, and roused to indignation against his adversary, and he is as much unable to overcome this rage as he is to overcome his desire of self-seeking, and he can no more avoid this seeking than he can avoid his own existence, and this he cannot do as being the creature of God, though a corrupt one.

The same is that fury of the world against the gospel of God, for by the gospel comes that stronger than he, who overcomes the quiet possessor of the palace, and condemns those desires of glory, of riches, of wisdom, of self-righteousness, and of all things in which he trusts. This very irritation of the wicked, when God speaks and acts contrary to what they willed, is their hardening and their galling weight, for as they are in this state of aversion from the very corruption of nature, so they become more and more averse, and worse and worse as this aversion is opposed or turned out of its way. And thus, when God threatened to take away from the wicked Pharaoh his power, he irritated and aggravated him, and hardened his heart the more, the more he came to him with his word by Moses, making known his intention to take away his kingdom and to deliver his own people from his power, because he did not give him his spirit within, but permitted his wicked corruption under the dominion of Satan to grow angry, to swell with pride, to burn with rage, and to go on still in a certain secure contempt.

Section 86 Let no one think, therefore, that God, where he is said to harden or to work evil in us, for to harden is to do evil, so does the evil as though he created evil in us anew, in the same way as a malignant liquor seller, being himself bad, would pour poison into or mix it up in a vessel that was not bad, where the vessel itself did nothing but receive or passively accomplish the purpose of the malignity of the poison mixer. For when people hear it said by us that God works in us both good and evil, and that we from mere necessity passively submit to the working of God, they seem to imagine that a man who is good or not evil in himself is passive while God works evil in him, not rightly considering that God is far from being inactive in all his creatures and never suffers any one of them to keep holiday. But whoever wishes to understand these things let him think thus, that God works evil in us, that is, by us, not from the fault of God but from the fault of evil in us, that is, as we are evil by nature, God, who is truly good, carrying us along by his own action according to the nature of his own omnipotence cannot do otherwise than do evil by us as instruments, though he himself be good, though by his wisdom he overrules that evil well to his own glory and to our salvation.

Thus God, finding the will of Satan evil, not creating it so, but leaving it while Satan sinningly commits the evil, carries it along by his working and moves it which way he will, though that will ceases not to be evil by this motion of God. In this same way also David spoke concerning Shimei. Let him curse, for God hath bidden him to curse David.

2 Samuel 16.10 How could God bid to curse, an action so evil and virulent? There was nowhere an external force. Thus God with the greatest certainty knew, and with the greatest certainty declared, that Pharaoh would be hardened. Because he with the greatest certainty knew, that the will of Pharaoh could neither resist the motion of his omnipotence, nor put away its own enmity, nor receive its adversary Moses.

And that, as that evil will still remained, he must of necessity become worse, more hardened, and more proud, while by his course in impetus, trusting to his own powers, he ran against that which he would not receive, and which he despised. Here, therefore, you see, it is confirmed, even by this very scripture, that free will can do nothing but evil, while God, who is not deceived from ignorance nor lies from iniquity, so surely promises the hardening of Pharaoh. Because he was certain that an evil will could will nothing but evil, and that, as the good which it hated was presented to it, it could not but wax worse and worse.

Section 88 It now, then, remains, that perhaps some one may ask, Why, then, does not God cease from that motion of his omnipotence by which the will of the wicked and the wicked motion of his by which by which the wicked and the of the the wicked of most learned men of so many ages? And no wonder, for even the sun itself would not shine, if it should be assailed by such arts as these. But, to say nothing about that which I have already proved from the scriptures, that Pharaoh cannot rightly be said to be hardened, because, being born with and by the long-suffering of God, he was not immediately punished, seeing that he was punished by so many plagues. If hardening be bearing with divine long-suffering and not immediately punishing, what need was there that God should so many times promise that he would harden the heart of Pharaoh when the signs should be wrought, who now, before those signs were wrought and before that hardening, was such that being inflated with his success, prosperity, and wealth, and being born with by the divine long-suffering and not punished, inflicted so many evils on the children of Israel? You see, therefore, that this trope of yours makes not at all to the purpose in this passage, seeing that it applies generally unto all as sinning because they are born with by the divine long-suffering, and thus we shall be compelled to say that all are hardened, seeing that there is no one who does not sin, and that no one sins but he who is born with by the divine long-suffering.

Wherefore, this hardening of Pharaoh is another hardening, independent of that general hardening as produced by the long-suffering of the divine goodness. Section 90 The more immediate the more immediate the the more immediate the more immediate the more immediate the the more the more immediate the more And again, For this purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show in thee my power, that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Exodus 9.16, Romans 9.17 Here you see that Pharaoh was for this purpose hardened, that he might resist God and put off the redemption, in order that there might be an occasion given for the working of signs, and for the display of the power of God, that he might be declared and believed on throughout all the earth.

And what is this but showing that all these things were said and done to confirm faith, and to comfort the weak, that they might afterwards freely believe in God as true, faithful, powerful, and merciful? Just as though he had spoken to them in the kindest manner as to little children, and had said, Be not terrified at the hardness of Pharaoh, for I will work that very hardness myself, and I who deliver you have it in my own hand. I will only use it, that I may thereby work many signs and

declare my majesty for the furtherance of your faith. And this is the reason why Moses generally, after each plague, repeats, And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, so that he would not let the people go, as the Lord had spoken.

Exodus 7, 13, 22, 8, 15, 32, 9, 12, and so forth. What is the intent of this, as the Lord had spoken, but that the Lord might appear true who had foretold that he should be hardened? Now, if there had been any veritability or liberty of will in Pharaoh, which could turn either way, God could not with such certainty have foretold his hardening. But as he promised, who could neither be deceived nor lie, it of certainty and of necessity came to pass that he was hardened.

Which could not have taken place had not the hardening been totally apart from the power of man, and in the power of God alone, in the same manner as I said before, namely, from God being certain that he should not omit the general operation of his omnipotence in Pharaoh, or on Pharaoh's account, nay, that he could not omit it. Moreover, God was equally certain that the will of Pharaoh being naturally evil and averse could not consent to the word and work of God, which was contrary to it, and that therefore, while the impetus of willing was preserved in Pharaoh by the omnipotence of God, and while the hated word and work was continually set before his eyes without, nothing else could take place in Pharaoh but offense and the hardening of his heart. For if God had then omitted the action of his omnipotence in Pharaoh when he set before him the word of Moses which he hated, and the will of Pharaoh might be supposed to have acted alone by its own power, then, perhaps, there might have been room for a discussion which way it had power to turn.

But now, since it was led on and carried away by its own willing, no violence was done to its will, because it was not forced against its will, but was carried along by the natural operation of God to will naturally just as it was by nature, that is, evil, and therefore it could not but run against the word, and thus become hardened. Hence we see that this passage makes most forcibly against free will, and in this way God who promised could not lie, and if he could not lie then Pharaoh could not but be hardened.

## 08 - Sections 91-110: Discussion, Part II-b

---

Section 91, but let us also look into Paul who takes up this passage of Moses, Romans 9. How miserably is the diatribe tortured with that part of the scripture. Lest it should lose its hold of free will, it puts on every shape. At one time it says that there is a necessity of the consequence, but not a necessity of the thing consequent.

At another, that there is an ordinary will, or will of the sign, which may be resisted, and the will of decree, which cannot be resisted. At another, that those passages adduced from Paul do not contend for, do not speak about the salvation of man. In one place it says that the prescience of God does impose necessity, in another that it does not impose necessity.

Again, in another place it asserts that grace prevents the will that it might will, and then attends it as it proceeds, and brings it to a happy issue. Here it states that the first cause does all things itself, and directly afterwards that it acts by second causes, remaining itself inactive. By these and the like sportings with words, it does nothing but fill up its time, and at the same time obscure the subject point from our sight, drawing us aside to something else.

So stupid and doltish does it imagine us to be, that it thinks we feel no more interested in the cause than it feels itself. Or, as little children, when fearing the rod or at play, cover their eyes with their hands, and think that as they see nobody themselves, nobody sees them. So the diatribe, not being able to endure the brightness, nay, the lightning of the most clear scriptures, pretending by every kind of maneuver that it does not see, which is in truth the case, wishes to persuade us that our eyes are also so covered that we cannot see.

But all these maneuvers are but evidences of a convicted mind rashly struggling against invincible truth. That figment about the necessity of the consequence, but not the necessity of the thing consequent, has been before refuted. Let then Erasmus invent and invent again, Cavil and Cavil again, as much as he will.

If God foreknew that Judas would be a traitor, Judas became a traitor of necessity. Nor was it in the power of Judas, nor of any other creature, to alter it, or to change that will, though he did what he did willingly, not by compulsion. For that willing of his was his own work, which God by the motion of his omnipotence moved on into action, as he does everything else.

God does not lie, nor is he deceived. This is a truth evident and invincible. There are no obscure or ambiguous words here, even though all the most learned man of all ages should be so blinded as to think and say to the contrary.

How much soever, therefore, you may turn your back upon it, yet the convicted conscience of yourself and all men is compelled to confess that if God be not deceived in that which he foreknows, that which he foreknows must of necessity take place. If it were not so, who could believe his promises? Who would fear his threatenings, if what he promised or threatened did not of necessity take place? Or how could he promise or threaten, if his prescience could be deceived

or hindered by our mutability? This all-clear light of certain truth manifestly stops the mouths of all, puts an end to all questions, and forever settles the victory over all evasive subtleties. We know, indeed, that the prescience of man is fallible.

We know that an eclipse does not therefore take place because it is foreknown, but that it is therefore foreknown because it is to take place. But what have we to do with this prescience? We are disputing about the prescience of God. And if you do not ascribe to this the necessity of the consequent foreknown, you take away faith and the fear of God, you destroy the force of all the divine promises and threatenings, and thus deny divinity itself.

But, however, the diatribe itself, after having held out for a long time and tried all things, and being pressed hard by the force of the truth, at last confesses my sentiment, saying, Section 92 The question concerning the will and predestination of God is somewhat difficult. For God wills those same things which he foreknows, and this is the substance of what Paul subjoins, who hath resisted his will, if he have mercy on whom he will and harden whom he will. For if there were a king who could effect whatever he chose, and no one could resist him, he would be said to do whatsoever he willed.

So the will of God, as it is the principal cause of all things which take place, seems to impose a necessity on our will. Thus the diatribe. At last, then, I give thanks to God for a sound sentence in the diatribe.

Where now, then, is free will? But again this slippery eel is twisted aside in a moment, saying, But Paul does not explain this point, he only rebukes the disputer. Who art thou, O man, that replyest against God? Romans 9.20 O notable evasion! Is this the way to handle the holy scriptures? Thus to make a declaration upon one's own authority and out of one's own brain without a scripture, without a miracle, nay, to corrupt the most clear words of God? What, does not Paul explain that point? What does he then? He only rebukes the disputer, says the diatribe. And is not that rebuke the most complete explanation? For what was inquired into by that question concerning the will of God? Was it not this, whether or not it imposed the necessity on our will? Paul, then, answers that it is thus.

He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. And whom he will, he hardeneth. It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.

Romans 9.15-16, 18 Moreover, not content with this explanation, he introduces those who murmur against this explanation in their defense of free will, and prate that there is no merit allowed that we are damned when the fault is not our own and the like, and stops their murmuring and indignation, saying, Thou wilt say then, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Romans 9.19 Do you not see that this is addressed to those who, hearing that the will of God imposes necessity on us, say, Why doth he yet find fault? That is, why does God thus insist, thus urge, thus exact, thus find fault? Why does he accuse? Why does he reprove, as though we men could do what he requires if we would? He has no just cause for thus finding fault. Let him rather accuse his own will. Let him find fault with that.

Let him press his requirement upon that. For who hath resisted his will? Who can obtain mercy if he wills not? Who can become softened if he wills to harden? It is not in our power to change his will, much less resist it where he wills us to be hardened. By that will, therefore, we are compelled

to be hardened, whether we will or no.

If Paul had not explained this question and had not stated to a certainty that necessity is imposed on us by the prescience of God, what need was there for his introducing the murmurs and complainers, saying that his will cannot be resisted? For who would have murmured or been indignant if he had not found necessity to be stated? Paul's words are not ambiguous where he speaks of resisting the will of God. Is there anything ambiguous in what resisting is, or what his will is? Is it at all ambiguous concerning what he is speaking when he speaks concerning the will of God? Let the myriads of the most approved doctors be blind. Let them pretend, if they will, that the scriptures are not quite clear and that they tremble at a difficult question.

We have words the most clear which plainly speak thus, The question, therefore, is not difficult. Nay, nothing can be more plain to common sense than that this conclusion is certain, stable, and true. If it be pre-established from the scriptures that God neither errs nor is deceived, then whatever God foreknows must of necessity take place.

It would be a difficult question indeed, nay, an impossibility, I confess, if you should attempt to establish both the prescience of God and the free will of man. For what could be more difficult, nay, a greater impossibility, than to attempt to prove that contradictions do not clash, or that a number may at the same time be both nine and ten? There is no difficulty on our side of the question, but it is sought for and introduced just as ambiguity and obscurity are sought for and violently introduced into the scriptures. The apostle, therefore, restrains the impious who are offended at these most clear words by letting them know that the divine will is accomplished by necessity in us.

And by letting them know also that it is defined to a certainty that they have nothing of liberty or free will left, but that all things depend upon the will of God alone. But he restrains them in this way, by commanding them to be silent and to revere the majesty of the divine power and will over which we have no control, but which has over us full control to do whatever it will. And yet it does us no injury, seeing that it is not indebted to us, it never received anything from us, it never promised us anything, but what itself pleased and willed.

Section 93 This, therefore, is not the place, this is not the time for adoring those Quirician caverns, but for admiring the true majesty in its to be feared, wonderful and incomprehensible judgments, and saying, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6 10 Whereas we are nowhere more irreverent and rash than in trespassing and arguing upon these very inscrutable mysteries and judgments. And while we are pretending to a great reverence in searching the holy scriptures, those which God has commanded to be searched we search not, but those which he has forbidden us to search into, those we search into and none other.

And that with an unceasing temerity, not to say blasphemy. For is it not searching with temerity when we attempt to make the all free prescience of God to harmonize with our freedom, preparing to derogate prescience from God rather than lose our own liberty? Is it not temerity when he imposes necessity upon us to say with murmurings and blasphemies, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Romans 9 19 Where is the God by nature most merciful? Where is he who willeth not the death of a sinner? As he then created us for this very purpose only, that he might delight himself in the torments of men and many things of the same kind, which will be

howled forth by the damned in hell to all eternity. But, however, natural reason herself is compelled to confess that the living and true God must be such and one as by his own liberty to impose necessity on us.

For he must be a ridiculous God, or idol rather, who did not to a certainty foreknow the future, or was liable to be deceived in events, when even the Gentiles ascribed to their gods fate inevitable. And he would be equally ridiculous if he could not do and did not all things, or if anything could be done without him. If then the prescience and omnipotence of God be granted, it naturally follows, as an irrefragable consequence, that we neither were made by ourselves, nor live by ourselves, nor do anything by ourselves, but by his omnipotence.

And since he at the first foreknew that we should be such, and since he has made us such, and moves and rules over us as such, how, I ask, can it be pretended that there is any liberty in us to do in any respect otherwise than he at first foreknew, and now proceeds in action? Wherefore the prescience and omnipotence of God are diametrically opposite to our free will, and it must be that either God is deceived in his prescience and errs in his action, which is impossible, or we act and are acted upon according to his prescience and action. But by the omnipotence of God I mean not that power by which he does not many things that he could do, but that actual power by which he powerfully works all in all, in which sense the scripture calls him omnipotent. This omnipotence and prescience of God, I say, utterly abolishes the doctrine of free will.

No pretext can here be framed about the obscurity of the scripture or the difficulty of the subject point. The words are most clear and known to every schoolboy, and the point is plain and easy and stands proved by judgment of common sense, so that the series of ages, of times, or of persons, either writing or teaching to the contrary, be it as great as it may, amounts to nothing at all. But it is this that seems to give greatest offense to common sense or natural reason, that the God who is set forth as being so full of mercy and goodness should of his mere will leave men, harden them, and damn them, as though he delighted in the sins and in the great and eternal torments of the miserable.

To think thus of God seems iniquitous, cruel, intolerable. And it is this that has given offense to so many and great men of so many ages. And who would not be offended? I myself have been offended more than once, even unto the deepest abyss of desperation.

Nay, so far as even to wish that I had never been born a man. That is, before I was brought to know how healthful that desperation was, and how near it was unto grace. Here it is that there has been so much toiling and laboring to excuse the goodness of God and to accuse the will of man.

Here it is that distinctions have been invented between the ordinary will of God and the absolute will of God, between the necessity of the consequence and the necessity of the thing consequent, and many other inventions of the same kind, by which nothing has ever been effected but an imposition upon the unlearned, by vanities of words, and by oppositions of science falsely so called. For after all, a conscious conviction has been left deeply rooted in the heart, both of the learned and the unlearned, if ever they have come to an experience of these things. And the knowledge that our necessity is a consequence that must follow upon the belief of the prescience and omnipotence of God.

And even natural reason herself, who is so offended at this necessity, and who invents so many contrivances to take it out of the way, is compelled to grant it upon her own conviction from her own judgment, even though there were no scriptures at all. For all men find these sentiments written in their hearts, and they acknowledge and approve them, though against their will, whenever they hear them treated on. First, that God is omnipotent, not only in power but in action, as I said before.

And that if it were not so, he would be a ridiculous God. And next, that he knows and foreknows all things, and neither can err nor be deceived. These two points then, being granted by the hearts and minds of all, they are at once compelled from an inevitable consequence to admit that we are not made from our own will, but from necessity.

And moreover, that we do not what we will according to the law of free will, but as God foreknew and proceeds in action, according to his infallible and immutable counsel and power. Wherefore it is found written alike in the hearts of all men, that there is no such thing as free will, though that writing be obscured by so many contending disputations, and by the great authority of so many men who have, through so many ages, taught otherwise. Even as every other law also, which, according to the testimony of Paul, is written in our hearts, is then acknowledged when it is rightly set forth, and then obscured when it is confused by wicked teachers and drawn aside by other opinions.

Section 95 I now return to Paul. If he does not, Romans 9, explain this point, nor clearly state our necessity from the prescience and will of God, what need was there for him to introduce the similitude of the potter, who, of the same lump of clay, makes one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour? Romans 9, 21. What need was there for him to observe that the thing formed does not say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? 20.

He is there speaking of men, and he compares them to clay, and God to a potter. This similitude therefore stands coldly useless, nay, is introduced ridiculously, and in vain, if it be not his sentiment, that we have no liberty whatever. Nay, the whole of the argument of Paul wherein he defends grace is in vain.

For the design of the whole epistle is to show that we can do nothing, even when we seem to do well. And he in the same epistle testifies where he says that Israel which followed after righteousness did not attain unto righteousness, but that the Gentiles which followed not after it did attain unto it. Romans 9, 30-31 Concerning which I shall speak more at large hereafter when I produce my forces.

The fact is, the diatribe designedly keeps back the body of Paul's argument and its scope, and comfortably satisfies itself with traiking upon a few detached and corrupted terms. Nor does the exhortation which Paul afterwards gives, Romans 11, at all help the diatribe, where he saith, Thou standest by faith, be not high-minded. 20 Again, and they also, if they shall believe, shall be grafted in, and so forth.

23 For he says nothing there about the ability of man, but brings forth imperative and conditional expressions, and what effect they are intended to produce has been fully shown already. Moreover, Paul there anticipating the boasters of free will does not say they can believe, but he saith, God is able to graft them in again. 23 To be brief, the diatribe moves along with so much

hesitation and so lingeringly in handling these passages of Paul that its conscience seems to give the lie to all that it writes.

For just at the point where it ought to have gone on to the proof, it for the most part stops short with a But of this enough. But I shall not now proceed with this. But this is not my present purpose.

But here they would have said so and so, and many evasions of the same kind. And it leaves off the subject just in the middle, so that you are left in uncertainty whether it wished to be understood as speaking on free will or whether it was only evading the sense of Paul by means of vanities of words. And all this is being just in its character as not having a serious thought upon the cause in which it is engaged.

But as for me, I dare not be thus cold, thus always on the tiptoe of policy, or thus move to and fro as a reed shaken by the wind. I must assert with certainty, with constancy, and with ardour, and prove what I assert solidly, appropriately, and fully. Section 96 And now, how excellently does the diatribe preserve liberty in harmony with necessity, where it says, Nor does all necessity exclude free will.

For instance, God the Father begets a son of necessity, but yet he begets him willingly and freely, seeing that he is not forced. Am I here, I pray you, disputing about compulsion and force? Have I not said in all my books again and again that my dispute on this subject is about the necessity of immutability? I know that the Father begets willingly, and that Judas willingly betrayed Christ. But I say this willing in the person of Judas was decreed to take place from immutability and certainty, if God foreknew it.

Or, if men do not yet understand what I mean, I make two necessities, the one a necessity of force in reference to the act, the other a necessity of immutability in reference to the time. Let him therefore who wishes to hear what I have to say understand that I here speak of the latter, not of the former. That is, I do not dispute whether Judas became a traitor willingly or unwillingly, but whether or not it was decreed to come to pass that Judas should will to betray Christ at a certain time infallibly predetermined of God.

But only listen to what the diatribe says upon this point. With reference to the immutable prescience of God, Judas was of necessity to become a traitor. Nevertheless, Judas had it in his power to change his own will.

Dost thou understand, friend diatribe, what thou sayest? To say nothing of that which has been already proved, that the will cannot will anything but evil. How could Judas change his own will if the immutable prescience of God stand granted? Could he change the prescience of God and render it fallible? Here the diatribe gives it up and, leaving its standard and throwing down its arms, runs from its post and hands over the discussion to the subtleties of the schools concerning the necessity of the consequence and of the thing consequent, pretending that it does not wish to engage in the discussion of points so nice. A step of policy, truly, friend diatribe, when you have brought the subject point into the midst of the field and just when the champion disputant was required, then you show your back and leave to others the business of answering and defining.

But you should have taken this step at the first and abstained from writing altogether. He who ne'er proved the training field of arms let him ne'er in the battle's brunt appear. For it never was

expected of Erasmus that he should remove that difficulty which lies in God's foreknowing all things and our nevertheless doing all things by contingency.

This difficulty existed in the world long before ever the diatribe saw the light. But yet it was expected that he should make some kind of answer and give some kind of definition, whereas he, by using a rhetorical transition, drags away us, knowing nothing of rhetoric, along with himself, as though we were here contending for a thing of thought and were engaged in quibbling about insignificant niceties. And thus nobly betakes himself out of the midst of the field, bearing the crowns both of the scholar and of the conqueror.

But not so, brother. There is no rhetoric of sufficient force to cheat an honest conscience. The voice of conscience is proof against all powers and figures of eloquence.

I cannot here suffer a rhetorician to pass on under the cloak of dissimulation. This is not a time for such maneuvering. This is that part of the discussion where matters come to the turning point.

Here is the hinge upon which the whole turns. Here, therefore, free will must be completely vanquished or completely triumphed. But here you, seeing your danger, nay, the certainty of the victory over free will, pretend that you see nothing but argumentative niceties.

Is this to act the part of a faithful theologian? Can you feel a serious interest in your cause who thus leave your auditors in suspense and your arguments in a state that confuses and exasperates them, while you nevertheless wish to appear to have given honest satisfaction and open explanation? This craft and cunning might perhaps be borne with in profane subjects. But in a theological subject, where simple and open truth is the object required for the salvation of souls, it is utterly hateful and intolerable. Section 97 The Sophists also felt the invincible and insupportable force of this argument, and therefore they invented the necessity of the consequence and of the thing consequent.

But to what little purpose this figment is I have shown already. For they do not all the while observe what they are saying and what conclusions they are admitting against themselves. For if you grant the necessity of the consequence, free will lies vanquished and prostrate, nor does either the necessity or the contingency of the thing consequent profit in anything.

What is it to me if free will be not compelled but do what it does willingly? It is enough for me that you grant that it is of necessity that it does willingly what it does, and that it cannot do otherwise if God foreknew it would be so. If God foreknew either that Judas would be a traitor or that he would change his willing to be a traitor, whichever of the two God foreknew must of necessity take place, or God will be deceived in his prescience and prediction, which is impossible. This is the effect of the necessity of the consequence.

That is, if God foreknows a thing, that thing must of necessity take place. That is, there is no such thing as free will. This necessity of the consequence, therefore, is not obscure or ambiguous, so that even if the doctors of all ages were blinded, yet they must admit it, because it is so manifest and plain as to be actually palpable.

And as to the necessity of the thing consequent with which they comfort themselves, that is a mere phantom, and is in diametrical opposition to the necessity of the consequence. For example, the necessity of the consequence is, so to set it forth, God foreknows that Judas will be a traitor,

therefore it will certainly and infallibly come to pass that Judas shall be a traitor. Against this necessity of the consequence, you comfort yourself thus.

But, since Judas can change his willing to betray, therefore, there is no necessity of the thing consequent. How, I ask you, will these two positions harmonize? Judas is able to will not to betray, and Judas must of necessity will to betray. Do not these two directly contradict and militate against each other? But he will not be compelled, you say, to betray against his will.

What is that to the purpose? You were speaking of the necessity of the thing consequent, and saying that that need not of necessity follow from the necessity of the consequence. You were not speaking of the compulsive necessity of the thing consequent. The question was concerning the necessity of the thing consequent, and you produce an example concerning the compulsive necessity of the thing consequent.

I ask you one thing, and you answer another. But this arises from that yawning sleepiness under which you do not observe what nothingness that figment amounts to, concerning the necessity of the thing consequent. Suffice it to have spoken thus to the former part of this second part, which has been concerning the hardening of Pharaoh, and which involves indeed all the Scriptures, and all our forces, and those invincible.

Now let us proceed to the remaining part concerning Jacob and Esau, who are spoken of as being not yet born. Romans 9.11 Section 98 This place the diatribe evades by saying that it does not properly pertain to the salvation of man. For God, it says, may will that a man shall be a servant or a poor man, and yet not reject him from eternal salvation.

Only observe, I pray you, how many evasions and ways of escape a slippery mind will invent, which would flee from the truth, and yet cannot get away from it after all. Be it so that this passage does not pertain to the salvation of man, to which point I shall speak hereafter. Are we to suppose, then, that Paul who adduces it does so for no purpose whatever? Shall we make Paul to be ridiculous, or a vain trifler in a discussion so serious? But all this breathes nothing but Jerome, who dares to say in more places than one, with his supercilious brow and a sacrilegious mouth, that those things are made to be of force in Paul, which in their own places are of no force.

This is no less than saying that Paul, where he lays the foundation of the Christian doctrine, does nothing but corrupt the Holy Scriptures, and delude believing souls with sentiments hatched out of his own brain, and violently thrust into the Scriptures. Is this honoring the Holy Spirit in Paul, that sanctified and elect instrument of God? Thus when Jerome ought to be read with judgment, and this saying of his to be numbered among those many things which that man impiously wrote, such was his yawning inconsiderateness, and his stupidity in understanding the Scriptures, the diatribe drags him in without any judgment, and not thinking it right that his authority should be lessened by any mitigating gloss whatever, takes him as a most certain oracle whereby to judge of, and attempt the Scriptures. And thus it is, we take the impious sayings of men as rules and guides in the Holy Scripture, and then wonder that it should become obscure and ambiguous, and that so many fathers should be blind in it, whereas the whole proceeds from this impious and sacrilegious reason.

Section 99 Let him then be anathema who shall say that those things which are of no force in their own place are made to be of force in Paul. This, however, is only said, it is not proved. And it is

said by those who understand neither Paul nor the passages adduced by him, but are deceived by terms, that is, by their own impious interpretations of them.

And if it be allowed that this passage, Genesis 25, 21 through 23, is to be understood in a temporal sense, which is not the true sense, yet it is rightly and effectually adduced by Paul when he proves from it that it was not of the merits of Jacob and Esau, but of him that calleth that it was said unto Rebekah, the elder shall serve the younger. Romans 9, 11 through 16 Paul is argumentatively considering whether or not they attained unto that which was said of them by the power or merits of free will. And he proves that they did not, but that Jacob attained unto that unto which Esau attained not solely by the grace of him that calleth.

And he proves that by the incontrovertible words of the scripture, that is, that they were not yet born, and also that they had done neither good nor evil. This proof contains the weighty sum of his whole subject point, and by this same proof our subject point is settled also. The diatribe, however, having dissemblingly passed over all these particulars with an excellent rhetorical fetch, does not here argue at all upon merit, which nevertheless it undertook to do, and which this subject point of Paul requires.

But cavils about temporal bondage, as though that were at all to the purpose. But it is merely that it might not seem to be overthrown by the all-forcible words of Paul. For what had it which it could yelp against Paul in support of free will? What did free will do for Jacob? Or what did it do against Esau when it was already determined by the prescience and predestination of God before either of them was born? What should be the portion of each? That is, that the one should serve and the other rule.

Thus the rewards were decreed before the workmen wrought or were born. It is to this that the diatribe ought to have answered. Paul contends for this, that neither had done either good or evil, and yet that by the divine sentence the one was decreed to be servant, the other lord.

The question here is not whether that servitude pertained unto salvation, but from what merit it was imposed on him who had not deserved it. But it is wearisome to contend with these depraved attempts to pervert and debate the scripture. Section 100 But, however, that Moses does not intend their servitude only, and that Paul is perfectly right in understanding it concerning eternal salvation is manifest from the text itself.

And although this is somewhat wide of our present purpose, yet I will not suffer Paul to be contaminated with the calumnies of the sacrilegious. The oracle in Moses is thus, Two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels, and the one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger. Genesis 25, 23 Here, manifestly, are two people distinctly mentioned.

The one, though the younger, is received into the grace of God, to the intent that he might overcome the other, not by his own strength indeed, but by a favoring God. For how could the younger overcome the elder unless God were with him? Since, therefore, the younger was to be the people of God, it is not only the external rule or servitude which is there spoken of, but all that pertains to the spirit of God, that is, the blessing, the word, the spirit, the promise of Christ, and the everlasting kingdom. And this the scripture more fully confirms afterwards, where it describes Jacob as being blessed and receiving the promises and the kingdom.

All this Paul briefly intimates when he saith, The elder shall serve the younger. And he sends us to Moses, who treats upon the particulars more fully. So that you may say in reply to the sacrilegious sentiment of Jerome and the diatribe, that these passages which Paul adduces have more force in their own place than they have in his epistle.

And this is true also not of Paul only, but of all the apostles, who adduce scriptures as testimonies and assertions of their own sentiments. But it would be ridiculous to adduce that as a testimony which testifies nothing and does not make it all to the purpose. And even if there were some among the philosophers so ridiculous as to prove that which was unknown by that which was less known still, or by that which was totally irrelevant to the subject, with what face can we attribute such kind of proceeding to the greatest champions and authors of the Christian doctrines, especially since they teach those things which are the essential articles of faith and on which the salvation of souls depends.

But such a face becomes those who in the holy scriptures feel no serious interest whatever. Section 101 And with respect to that of Malachi, which Paul annexes, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated, Malachi 1, 2-3, that the diatribe perverts by a threefold contrivance. The first is, if, it says, you stick to the letter, God does not love as we love, nor does he hate anyone, because passions of this kind do not pertain unto God.

What do I hear? Are we now inquiring whether or not God loves and hates, and not, rather, why he loves and hates? Our inquiry is from what merit it is in us that he loves or hates. We know well enough that God does not love or hate as we do, because we love and hate mutably, but he loves and hates from an eternal and immutable nature, and hence it is that accidents and passions do not pertain unto him. And it is this very state of the truth that of necessity proves free will to be nothing at all, seeing that the love and hatred of God towards men is immutable and eternal, existing not only before there was any merit or work of free will, but before the worlds were made, and that all things take place in us from necessity, accordingly as he loved or loved not from all eternity, so that not the love of God only, but even the manner of his love imposes on us necessity.

Here, then, it may be seen how much its invented ways of escape profit the diatribe, for the more it attempts to get away from the truth, the more it runs upon it, with so little success does it fight against it. But be it so that your trope stands good, that the love of God is the effect of love, and the hatred of God is the effect of hatred. Does then that effect take place without and independent of the will of God? Will you here say also that God does not will as we do, and that the passion of willing does not pertain to him? If then those effects take place, they do not take place but according to the will of God.

Hence, therefore, what God wills, that he loves and hates. Now then, tell me, for what merit did God love Jacob and hate Esau before they wrought or were born? Wherefore it stands manifest that Paul most rightly adduces Malachi in support of the passage from Moses. That is, that God therefore called Jacob before he was born because he loved him, but that he was not first loved by Jacob nor moved to love him from any merit in him, so that in the cases of Jacob and Esau it is shown what ability there is in our free will.

The second contrivance is this, that Malachi does not seem to speak of that hatred by which we are damned to all eternity, but of temporal affliction, seeing that those are reprov'd who wished to

destroy Edom. This again is advanced in contempt of Paul as though he had done violence to the Scriptures. Thus we hold in no reverence whatever the majesty of the Holy Spirit and only aim at establishing our own sentiments.

But let us bear with this contempt for a moment and see what it affects. Malachi then speaks of temporal affliction. And what if he do? What is that to your purpose? Paul proves out of Malachi that the affliction was laid on Esau without any desert by the hatred of God only, and this he does that he might thence conclude that there is no such thing as free will.

This is the point that makes against you, and it is to this you ought to have answered. I am arguing about merit, and you are all the while talking about reward, and yet you so talk about it as not to evade that which you wish to evade. Nay, in your very talking about reward, you acknowledge merit, and yet pretend you do not see it.

Tell me then, what moved God to love Jacob and to hate Esau even before they were born? But, however, the assertion that Malachi is speaking of temporal affliction only is false. Nor is he speaking of the destroying of Edom. You entirely pervert the sense of the prophet by this contrivance.

The prophet shows what he means in words the most clear. He upbraids the Israelites with ingratitude, because, after God had loved them, they did not in return either love him as their father or fear him as their lord. Malachi 1.6 That God had loved them, he proves both by the scriptures and by facts, namely in this, that although Jacob and Esau were brothers, as Moses records Genesis 25, 21-28, yet he loved Jacob and chose him before he was born, as we have heard from Paul already.

But that he so hated Esau that he removed away his dwelling into the desert. That, moreover, he so continued and pursued that hatred that when he brought back Jacob from captivity and restored him, he will not suffer the Edomites to be restored. And that even if they at any time said they wished to build, he threatened them with destruction.

If this be not the plain meaning of the prophet's text, let the whole world prove me a liar. Therefore, the temerity of the Edomites is not here reprov'd, but, as I said before, the ingratitude of the sons of Jacob, who do not see what God has done for them and against their brethren the Edomites, and for no other reason than because he hated the one and loved the other. How then will your assertions stand good that the prophet is here speaking of temporal affliction when he testifies in the plainest words that he is speaking of the two people as proceeding from the two patriarchs, the one received to be a people and saved, and the other left and at last destroyed? To be received as a people and not to be received as a people does not pertain to temporal good and evil only, but unto all things.

For our God is not the God of temporal things only, but of all things. Nor does God will to be thy God so as to be worshipped with one shoulder or with a lame foot, but with all thy might and with all thy heart, that he may be thy God as well here as hereafter in all things, times, and works. The third contrivance is that according to the trope interpretation of the passage, God neither loves all the Gentiles nor hates all the Jews, but out of each people some.

And that, by this use of the trope, the Scripture testimony in question does not at all go to prove necessity, but to beat down the arrogance of the Jews. The diatribe, having opened this way of escape, then comes to this, that God is said to hate men before they are born, because he foreknows that they will do that which will merit hatred, and that thus the hatred and love of God do not at all militate against free will. And at last it draws this conclusion, that the Jews were cut off from the olive tree on account of the merit of unbelief, and the Gentiles grafted in on account of the merit of faith, according to the authority of Paul.

And that a trope is held out to those who are cut off of being grafted in again, and a warning given to those who are grafted in that they fall not off. May I perish if the diatribe itself knows what it is talking about? But perhaps this is also a rhetorical fetch, which teaches you when any danger seems to be at hand, always to render your sense obscure, lest you should be taken in your own words. I, for my part, can see no place whatever in this passage for those trope interpretations, of which the diatribe dreams, but which it cannot establish by proof.

Therefore, it is no wonder that this testimony does not make against it in the trope interpreted sense, because it has no such sense. Moreover, we are not disputing about cutting off and grafting in, of which Paul here speaks in his exhortations. I know that men are grafted in by faith and cut off by unbelief, and that they are to be exhorted to believe that they be not cut off.

But it does not follow, nor is it proved from this, that they can believe or fall away by the power of free will, which is now the point in question. We are not disputing about who are the believing and who are not, who are Jews and who are Gentiles, and what is the consequence of believing and falling away. That pertains to exhortation.

Our point in dispute is by what merit or work they attain unto that faith by which they are grafted in, or unto that unbelief by which they are cut off. This is the point that belongs to you as the teacher of free will. And pray, describe to me this merit.

Paul teaches us that this comes to them by no work of theirs, but only according to the love or the hatred of God. And when it is come to them, he exhorts them to persevere, that they be not cut off. But this exhortation does not prove what we can do, but what we ought to do.

I am compelled thus to hedge in my adversary with many words, lest he should slip away and leave the subject point and take up anything but that. And in fact, to hold him thus to the point is to vanquish him. For all that he aims at is to slide away from the point, withdraw himself out of sight, and take up anything but that which he first lay down as his subject design.

Section 104 The next passage which the diatribe takes up is that of Isaiah 45, 9. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, what makest thou? And that of Jeremiah 18, 6. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand. Here the diatribe says again, these passages are made to have more force in Paul than they have in the place of the prophets from which they are taken. Because in the prophets they speak of temporal affliction, but Paul uses them with reference to eternal election and reprobation.

So that here again, temerity or ignorance in Paul is insinuated. But before we see how the diatribe proves that neither of these passages excludes free will, I will make this remark, that Paul does not appear to have taken this passage out of the scriptures, nor does the diatribe prove that he has.

For Paul usually mentions the name of his author or declares that he has taken a certain part from the scriptures, whereas here he does neither.

It is most probable therefore that Paul uses this general similitude according to his spirit in support of his own cause, as others have used it in support of theirs. It is in the same way that he uses this similitude, a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, which 1 Corinthians 5.6 he uses to represent corrupt morals and applies it in another place, Galatians 5.9, to those who corrupt the word of God. So Christ also speaks of the leaven of Herod and of the Pharisees, Mark 8.15, Matthew 16.6. Supposing therefore that the prophets used this similitude when speaking more particularly of temporal punishment, upon which I shall not now dwell, lest I should be too much occupied about irrelevant questions and kept away from the subject point, yet Paul uses it in his spirit against free will.

And as to saying that the liberty of the will is not destroyed by our being as clay in the hand of an afflicting God, I know not what it means, nor why the diatribe contends for such a point. For without doubt, afflictions come upon us from God against our will and impose upon us the necessity of bearing them whether we will or no. Nor is it in our power to avert them, though we are exhorted to bear them with a willing mind.

Section 105 But it is worthwhile to hear the diatribe make out how it is that the argument of Paul does not exclude free will by that similitude. For it brings forward two absurd objections, the one taken from the Scriptures, the other from reason. From the Scriptures, it collects this objection.

When Paul, 2 Timothy 2.20, had said that in a great house there are vessels of gold in silver, wood, and earth, some to honor and some to dishonor, he immediately adds, If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, and so forth. 21 Then the diatribe goes on to argue thus. What could be more ridiculous than for anyone to say to an earthen chamber convenience, If thou shalt purify thyself, thou shalt be a vessel unto honor? But this would be rightly said to a rational earthen vessel, which can, when admonished, form itself according to the will of the Lord.

By these observations, it means to say that the similitude is not in all respects applicable, and is so mistaken that it affects nothing at all. I answer, not to cavil upon this point, that Paul does not say if any one shall purify himself from his own filth, but from these, that is, from the vessels unto dishonor. So that the sense is, If any one shall remain separate, and shall not mingle himself with wicked teachers, he shall be a vessel unto honor.

Let us grant also that this passage of Paul makes for the diatribe just as it wishes, that is, that the similitude is not effective. But how will it prove that Paul is here speaking on the same subject as he is in Romans 9, 11-23, which is the passage in dispute? Is it enough to cite a different passage without at all regarding whether it have the same or a different tendency? There is not, as I have often shown, a more easy or more frequent fall in the Scriptures than the bringing together different Scripture passages as being of the same meaning. Hence the similitude in those passages of which the diatribe boasts makes less to its purpose than our similitude which it would refute.

But not to be contentious, let us grant that each passage of Paul is of the same tendency, and that a similitude does not always apply in all respects, which is without controversy true, for otherwise it

would not be a similitude nor a translation, but the thing itself. According to the proverb, a similitude halts and does not always go upon four feet. Yet the diatribe errs and transgresses in this, neglecting the scope of the similitude which is to be most particularly observed, it contentiously catches at certain words of it, whereas the knowledge of what is said, as Hilary observes, is to be gained from the scope of what is said, not from certain detached words only.

Thus the efficacy of the similitude depends upon the cause of the similitude. Why, then, does the diatribe disregard that for which the purpose of Paul uses this similitude, and catch at that which he says is unconnected with the purport of the similitude? That is to say, it is an exhortation where he saith, if a man purge himself from these, but a point of doctrine where he saith, in a great house there are vessels of gold and so forth. So that from all the circumstances of the words and mind of Paul, you may understand that he is establishing the doctrine concerning the diversity and use of vessels.

The sense, therefore, is this. Seeing that so many depart from the faith, there is no comfort for us but the being certain that the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his, and let every one that calleth upon the name of the Lord depart from evil. 2nd Timothy 2.19 This, then, is the cause and efficacy of the similitude, that God knows his own, then follows the similitude, that there are different vessels, some to honor and some to dishonor.

By this it is proved at once that the vessels do not prepare themselves, but that the master prepares them. And this is what Paul means where he saith, Hath not the potter power over the clay? and so forth. Romans 9.21 Thus the similitude of Paul stands most effective, and that to prove that there is no such thing as free will in the sight of God.

After this follows the exhortation, If a man purify himself from these, and so forth. And for what purpose this is may be clearly collected from what we have said already. It does not follow from this that the man can purify himself, nay, if anything be proved thereby it is this, that free will can purify itself without grace.

For he does not say if grace purify a man, but if a man purify himself. But concerning imperative and conditional passages we have said enough. Moreover, the similitude is not set forth in conditional, but in indicative verbs.

That the elect and the reprobate are as vessels of honor and of dishonor. In a word, if this fetch stand good, the whole argument of Paul comes to nothing. For in vain does he introduce vessels murmuring against God as the potter, if the fault plainly appear to be in the vessel and not in the potter.

For who would murmur at hearing him damned who merited damnation? Section 106 The other absurd objection the diatribe gathers from Madame Reason, who is called Human Reason, that the fault is not to be laid on the vessel, but on the potter. Especially since he is such a potter who creates the clay as well as attempts it. Whereas, says the diatribe, here the vessel is cast into eternal fire, which merited nothing, except that it had no power of its own.

In no one place does the diatribe more openly betray itself than in this. For it is here heard to say, in other words indeed, but in the same meaning, that which Paul makes the impious to say. Why doth he yet complain? For who hath resisted his will? Romans 9.19 This is that which Reason

cannot receive, and cannot bear.

This is that which has offended so many men renowned for talent, who have been received through so many ages. Here they require that God should act according to human laws, and do what seems right unto men, or cease to be God. His secrets of majesty, say they, do not better his character in our estimation.

Let him render a reason why he is God, or why he wills and does that which has no appearance of justice in it. It is as if one should ask a cobbler or a collar-maker to take the seat of judgment. Thus flesh does not think God worthy of so great glory, that it should believe him to be just and good, while he says and does those things which are above that which the volume of Justin and the fifth book of Aristotle's Ethics have defined to be justice.

That majesty which is the creating cause of all things must bow to one of the dregs of his creation, and that Corician cavern must vice versa fear its spectators. It is absurd that he should condemn him who cannot avoid the merit of damnation, and on account of this absurdity it must be false that God has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardens whom he will. Romans 9.18 He must be brought to order.

He must have certain laws prescribed to him that he damn not anyone but him who, according to our judgment, deserves to be damned. And thus an effectual answer is given to Paul and his similitude. He must recall it and allow it to be utterly ineffective, and must so attemper it that this potter, according to the diatribe's interpretation, make the vessel to dishonor from merit preceding, in the same manner in which he rejected some Jews on account of unbelief and received Gentiles on account of faith.

But if God work thus and have respect unto merit, why do these impious ones murmur and expostulate? Why do they say, Why doth he find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Romans 9.19 And what need was there for Paul to restrain them? For who wonders even, much less is indignant and expostulates, when any one is damned who merited damnation? Moreover, where remains the power of the potter to make that vessel he will, if, being subject to merit and laws, he is not permitted to make what he will, but is required to make what he ought? The respect of merit militates against the power and liberty of making what he will, as is proved by that good man of the house, who, when the workmen murmured and expostulated concerning their right, objected in answer, Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? These are the arguments which will not permit the gloss of the diatribe to be of any avail. Section 107 But let us, I pray you, suppose that God ought to be such an one who should have respect unto merit in those who are to be damned. Must we not, in like manner, also require and grant that he ought to have respect unto merit in those who are to be saved? For if we are to follow reason, it is equally unjust that the undeserving should be crowned as that the undeserving should be damned.

We will conclude, therefore, that God ought to justify from merit preceding, or we will declare him to be unjust, as being one who delights in evil and wicked men, and who invites and crowns their impiety by rewards. And then, woe unto you sensibly miserable sinners under that God, for who among you can be saved? Behold, therefore, the iniquity of the human heart. When God saves the undeserving without merit, nay, justifies the impious with all their demerit, it does not accuse him of iniquity, it does not expostulate with him why he does it, although it is, in its own judgment, most

iniquitous.

But because it is to its own profit and plausible, it considers it just and good. But when he damns the undeserving, this, because it is not to its own profit, is iniquitous. This is intolerable.

Here it expostulates, here it murmurs, here it blasphemes. You see, therefore, that the diatribe, together with its friends, do not in this cause judge according to equity, but according to the feeling sense of their own profit. For if they regarded equity, they would expostulate with God when he crowned the undeserving as they expostulate with him when he damns the undeserving.

And also, they would equally praise and proclaim God when he damns the undeserving as they do when he saves the undeserving. For the iniquity in either instance is the same if our own opinion be regarded, unless they mean to say that the iniquity is not equal whether you laud Cain for his fratricide and make him a king, or cast the innocent Abel into prison and murder him. Since, therefore, reason praises God when he saves the undeserving, but accuses him when he damns the undeserving, it stands convicted of not praising God as God, but as a certain one who serves its own profit.

That is, it seeks in God itself and the things of itself, but seeks not God and the things of God. But if it be pleased with a God who crowns the undeserving, it ought not to be displeased with a God who damns the undeserving. For if he be just in the one instance, how shall he not be just in the other, seeing that in the one instance he pours forth grace and mercy upon the undeserving, and in the other pours forth wrath and severity upon the undeserving? He is, however, in both instances monstrous and iniquitous in the sight of men, yet just and true in himself.

But how it is just that he should crown the undeserving is incomprehensible now, but we shall see when we come there where it will be no longer believed, but seen in revelation face to face. So also, how it is just that he should damn the undeserving is incomprehensible now, yet we believe it until the Son of Man shall be revealed. Section 108 The diatribe, however, being itself bitterly offended at this similitude of the potter and the clay, is not a little indignant in that it should be so pestered with it.

And at last it comes to this. Having collected together different passages of Scripture, some of which seem to attribute all to man, others all to grace, it angrily contends that the Scriptures on both sides should be understood according to a sound interpretation, and not received simply as they stand. And that otherwise, if we still so press upon it that similitude, it is prepared to press upon us in retaliation those subjunctive and conditional passages, and especially that of Paul, if a man purify himself from these.

This passage, it says, makes Paul to contradict himself, and to attribute all to man, unless a sound interpretation be brought in to make it clear. And if an interpretation be admitted here in order to clear up the cause of grace, why should not an interpretation be admitted in the similitude of the potter also to clear up the cause of free will? I answer. It matters not with me whether you receive the passages in a simple sense, a twofold sense, or a hundredfold sense.

What I say is this, that by this sound interpretation of yours, nothing that you desire is either affected or proved. For that which is required to be proved according to your design is that free will cannot will good. Whereas by this passage, if a man purify himself from these, as it is a conditional

sentence, neither anything nor nothing is proved, for it is only an exhortation of Paul.

Or if you add the conclusion of the diatribe and say the exhortation is in vain if a man cannot purify himself, then it proves that free will can do all things without grace, and thus the diatribe explodes itself. We are waiting, therefore, for some passage of the scripture to show us that this interpretation is right. We give no credit to those who hatch it out of their own brain, for we deny that any passage can be found which attributes all to man.

We deny that Paul contradicts himself where he says if a man shall purify himself from these, and we aver that both the contradiction and the interpretation which exhorts it are fictions, that they are both thought of but neither of them proved. This, indeed, we confess, that if we were permitted to augment the scriptures by the conclusions and additions of the diatribe and to say if we are not able to perform the things which are commanded, the precepts are given in vain, then in truth Paul would militate against himself, as would the whole scripture also, for then the scripture would be different from what it was before and would prove that free will can do all things. What wonder, however, if he should then contradict himself again where he saith in another place that God worketh all in all, 1 Corinthians 12, 6. But, however, the scripture in question, thus augmented, makes not only against us but against the diatribe itself, which defined free will to be that which cannot will anything good.

Let, therefore, the diatribe clear itself first and say how these two assertions agree with Paul. Free will cannot will anything good and also if a man purify himself from these, therefore man can purify himself or it is said in vain. You see, therefore, that the diatribe being entangled and overcome by that similitude of the potter only aims at evading it, not at all considering in the meantime how its interpretation militates against its subject point and how it is refuting and laughing at itself.

Section 109 But as to myself, as I said before, I never aimed at any kind of invented interpretation, nor did I ever speak thus, Stretch forth thine hand, that is, grace shall stretch it forth. All these things are the diatribe's own inventions concerning me to the furtherance of its own cause. What I said was this, that there is no contradiction in the words of the scripture nor any need of an invented interpretation to clear up a difficulty, but that the asserters of free will willfully stumbled upon plain ground and dream of contradictions where there are none.

For example, there is no contradiction in these scriptures if a man purify himself and God worketh all in all, nor is it necessary to say in order to explain this difficulty God does something and man does something, because the former scripture is conditional, which neither affirms or denies any work or power in man, but simply shows what work or power there ought to be in man. There is nothing figurative here, nothing that requires an invented interpretation. The words are plain, the sense is plain, that is, if you do not add conclusions and corruptions after the manner of the diatribe, for then the sense would not be plain.

Not, however, by its own fault, but by the fault of the corruptor. But the latter scripture, God worketh all in all, 1 Corinthians 12, 6, is an indicative passage, declaring that all works and all power are of God. How then do these two passages, the one of which says nothing of the power of man, and the other of which attributes all to God, contradict each other, and not rather sweetly harmonize? But the diatribe is so drowned, suffocated in, and corrupted with, that sense of the carnal interpretation, that impossibilities are commanded in vain, that it has no power over itself.

But as soon as it hears an interpretive or conditional word, it immediately tacks to it its indicative conclusions. A certain thing is commanded, therefore we are able to do it, and do do it, or the command is ridiculous. On this side, it bursts forth and boasts of its own complete victory, as though it held it as a settled point, that these conclusions, as soon as hatched in thought, were established as firmly as the divine authority.

And hence it pronounces with all confidence that in some places of the Scripture all is attributed to man, and that therefore there is a contradiction that requires interpretation. But it does not see that all this is the figment of its own brain, nowhere confirmed by one iota of Scripture, and not only so, but that it is of such a nature that if it were admitted it would confute no one more directly than itself, because, if it proved anything, it would prove that free will can do all things, whereas it undertook to prove the directly contrary. Section 110 In the same way also it so continually repeats this, If man do nothing there is no place for merit, and where there is no place for merit there can be no place either for punishment or for reward.

Here again it does not see that by these carnal arguments it refutes itself more directly than it refutes us. For what do these conclusions prove but that all merit is in the power of free will? And then, where is any room for grace? Moreover, supposing free will to merit a certain little and grace the rest, why does free will receive the whole reward? Or shall we suppose it to receive but a certain small portion of the reward? Then, if there be a place for merit, in order that there might be a place for reward, the merit must be as great as the reward. But why do I thus lose both words and time upon a thing of naught? For even supposing the whole were established at which the diatribe is aiming, and that merit is partly the work of man and partly the work of God, yet it cannot define that work itself, what it is, of what kind it is, or how far it is to extend.

Therefore, its disputation is about nothing at all. Since, therefore, it cannot prove any one thing which it asserts, nor establish its interpretation, nor contradiction, nor bring forward a passage that attributes all to man, and since all are the phantoms of its own cognition, Paul's similitude of the potter and the clay stands unshaken and invincible, that it is not, according to our free will, what kind of vessels we are made. And as to the exhortations of Paul, if a man purify himself from these and the like, they are certain models, according to which we ought to be formed, but they are not proofs of our working power or of our desire.

Suffice it to have spoken thus upon these points, the hardening of Pharaoh, the case of Esau, and the similitude of the potter.

## 09 - Sections 111-125: Discussion, Part II-c

---

Sections 111 through 125 of *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther, translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain. Discussion, second part, continued.

Section 111. The diatribe at length comes to the passages cited by Luther against free will with the intent to refute them. The first passage is that of Genesis 6.3. My spirit shall not always remain in man, seeing that he is flesh.

This passage, it confutes variously. First, it says that flesh here does not signify vile affection, but infirmity. Then it augments the text of Moses, that this saying of his refers to the men of that age and not to the whole race of men, as if he said, in these men.

And, moreover, that it does not refer to all the men, even of that age, because Noah was accepted. And, at last, it says that this word has in the Hebrew another signification, that it signifies the mercy and not the severity of God, according to the authority of Jerome. By this it would perhaps persuade us that since that saying did not apply to Noah but to the wicked, it was not the mercy but the severity of God that was shown to Noah, and the mercy not the severity of God that was shown to the wicked.

But let us away with these ridiculing vanities of the diatribe, for there is nothing which it advances which does not evince that it looks upon the Scriptures as mere fables. What Jerome here triflingly talks about is nothing at all to me, for it is certain that he cannot prove anything that he says. Nor is our dispute concerning the sense of Jerome but concerning the sense of the Scripture.

Let that perverter of the Scriptures attempt to make it appear that the Spirit of God signifies indignation. I say that he is deficient in both parts of the necessary twofold proof. First, he cannot produce one passage of the Scripture in which the Spirit of God is understood as signifying indignation.

For, on the contrary, kindness and sweetness are everywhere ascribed to the Spirit. And next, if he should prove that it is understood in any place as signifying indignation, yet he cannot easily prove that it follows of necessity that it is so to be received in this place. So also let him attempt to make it appear that flesh is here to be understood as signifying infirmity.

Yet he is as deficient as ever in proof, for where Paul calls the Corinthians carnal, he does not signify infirmity but corrupt affection, because he charges them with strife and divisions, which is not infirmity or incapacity to receive stronger doctrine, but malice and that old leaven which he commands them to purge out, 1 Corinthians 3, 3 and 7. But let us examine the Hebrew. Section 112 My spirit shall not always judge in man, for he is flesh. These are verbatim the words of Moses.

And if we would away with our own dreams, the words as they there stand are, I think, sufficiently plain and clear, and that they are the words of an angry God as fully manifest, both from what precedes and from what follows, together with the effect, the flood. The cause of their being

spoken was the sons of men taking unto them wives from the mere lust of the flesh, and then so filling the earth with violence as to cause God to hasten the flood, and scarcely to delay that for an hundred and twenty years, Genesis 6, 1 through 3, which but for them he would never have brought upon the earth at all. Read and study Moses, and you will plainly see that this is his meaning.

But it is no wonder that the Scriptures should be obscure, or that you should be enabled to establish from them not only a free, but a divine will, where you are allowed so to trifle with them as to seek to make out of them a Virgilian patchwork. And this is what you call clearing up difficulties, and putting an end to all dispute by means of an interpretation. But it is with these trifling vanities that Jerome and Origen have filled the world, and have been the original cause of that pestilent practice, the not attending to the simplicity of the Scriptures.

It is enough for me to prove that in this passage the divine authority calls men flesh, and flesh in that sense that the Spirit of God could not continue among them, but was at a decreed time to be taken from them. And what God meant when he declared that his Spirit should not always judge among men is explained immediately afterwards, where he determines an hundred and twenty years as the time that he would still continue to judge. Here he contrasts spirit with flesh, showing that men being flesh receive not the Spirit, and he as being a spirit cannot approve of flesh.

Wherefore it is that the Spirit, after an hundred and twenty years, is to be withdrawn. Hence you may understand the passage of Moses thus, My Spirit, which is in Noah and in the other holy men, rebukes those impious ones by the word of their preaching and by their holy lives. For to judge among men is to act among them in the office of the word, to reprove, to rebuke, to beseech them opportunely and importunely, but in vain.

For they, being blinded and hardened by the flesh, only become the worse the more they are judged. And so it ever is, that wherever the word of God comes forth in the world, these men become the worse the more they hear of it. And this is the reason why wrath is hastened, even as the flood was hastened at that time, because they now not only sin, but even despise grace.

As Christ saith, Light is come into the world, and men hate the light. John 3.19 Since, therefore, men, according to the testimony of God himself, are flesh, they can savour of nothing but flesh, so far is it from possibility that free will should do anything but sin. And if, even while the Spirit of God is among them calling and teaching, they only become worse, what will they do when left to themselves without the Spirit of God? Section 113 Nor is it at all to the purpose, you are saying, that Moses is speaking with reference to the men of that age.

For the same applies unto all men, because all are flesh. As Christ saith, That which is born of the flesh is flesh. John 3.6 And how deep a corruption that is, he himself shows in the same chapter, where he saith, Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Let, therefore, the Christian know, that Origen and Jerome, together with all their train, perniciously err when they say that flesh ought not in these passages to be understood as meaning corrupt affection. Because that of 1 Corinthians 3.3, For ye are yet carnal, signifies ungodliness. For Paul means that there are some among them still ungodly, and moreover, that even the saints, in as far as they savour of carnal things, are carnal, though justified by the Spirit.

In a word, you may take this as a general observation upon the Scriptures. Wherever mention is made of flesh in contradistinction to spirit, you may thereby flesh understand everything that is contrary to spirit, as in this passage, The flesh profiteth nothing. John 6.63 But where it is used abstractly, there you may understand the corporal state and nature, as They twain shall be one flesh.

Matthew 19.5 My flesh is meat indeed. John 6.55 The word was made flesh. John 1.14 In such passages, you may make a figurative alteration in the Hebrew, and for flesh, say, body.

For in the Hebrew tongue, the one term flesh embraces in signification our two terms, flesh and body. And I could wish that these two terms had been distinctively used throughout the canon of the Scripture. Thus then, I presume, my passage, Genesis 6, still stands directly against free will, since flesh is proved to be that which Paul declares, Romans 8.5-8, cannot be subject to God as we may there see, and since the diatribe itself asserts that it cannot will anything good.

Section 114 Another passage is that of Genesis 8.21 The thought and imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. And that also, Genesis 6.5 Every imagination of man's heart is only evil continually. These passages it evades thus.

The proneness to evil which is in most men does not wholly take away the freedom of the will. Does God, I pray you, here speak of most men, and not rather all men, when, after the flood, as it were, repenting, He promises to those who were then remaining and to those who were to come that He would no more bring a flood upon the earth for man's sake, assigning this as the reason, because man is prone to evil. As though He had said, If I should act according to the wickedness of man, I should never cease from bringing a flood.

Wherefore, henceforth, I will not act according to that which he deserves, and so forth. You see, therefore, that God, both before and after the flood, declares that man is evil, so that what the diatribe says about most men amounts to nothing at all. Moreover, a proneness or inclination to evil appears to the diatribe to be a matter of little moment, as though it were in our own power to keep ourselves upright or to restrain it, whereas the Scripture, by that proneness, signifies the continual bent and impetus of the will to evil.

Why does not the diatribe here appeal to the Hebrew? Moses says nothing there about proneness, but that you may have no room for cavillation, the Hebrew, Genesis 6.5, runs thus, That is, every imagination of the thought of the heart is only evil all days. He does not say that he is intent or prone to evil, but that evil altogether, and nothing but evil, is thought or imagined by man throughout his whole life. The nature of his evil is described to be that which neither does nor can do anything but evil, as being evil itself.

For according to the testimony of Christ, an evil tree can bring forth none other than evil fruit, Matthew 7.17-18. And as to the diatribes pertly objecting, why was time given for repentance then, if no part of repentance depend on free will, and all things be conducted according to the law of necessity? I answer, you may make the same objection to all the precepts of God, and say, why does he command at all, if all things take place of necessity? He commands in order to instruct and admonish that men being humbled under the knowledge of their evil might come to grace, as I have fully shown already. This passage therefore still remains invincible against the freedom of the will. Section 115.

The third passage is that of Isaiah 42. She hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins. Jerome, says the diatribe, interprets this concerning the divine vengeance, not concerning his grace, given in return for evil deeds.

I hear you. Jerome says so, therefore it is true. I am disputing about Isaiah, who here speaks in the clearest words, and Jerome is cast in my teeth, a man, to say no worse of him, of neither judgment nor application.

Where now is that promise of ours by which we agreed at the outset that we would go according to the Scriptures, and not according to the commentaries of men? The whole of this chapter of Isaiah, according to the testimony of the evangelists where they mention it, is referring to John the Baptist. The voice of one crying speaks of the remission of sins proclaimed by the Gospel. But we will allow Jerome, after his manner, to thrust in the blindness of the Jews for an historical sense, and his own trifling vanities for an allegory.

And, turning all grammar upside down, we will understand this passage as speaking of vengeance, which speaks of the remission of sins. But, I pray you, what vengeance is fulfilled in the preaching of Christ? Let us, however, see how the words run in the Hebrew. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, in the vocative, or, my people, in the objective, saith your God.

He, I presume, who commands the comfort is not executing vengeance. It then follows, Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem and cry unto her. Isaiah 40, 1-2 Speak ye to the heart is a Hebraism and signifies to speak good things, sweet things, and alluring things.

Thus Shechem, Genesis 34, 3, speaks to the heart of Dinah whom he defiled. That is, when she was heavy-hearted, he comforted her with tender words, as our translator has rendered it. And what those good and sweet things are which are commanded to be proclaimed to their comfort? The prophet explains directly afterwards, saying, That her warfare is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned, for she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

Her warfare, Melitia, which our translators have rendered her evil, Melitia, is considered by the Jews, those audacious grammarians, to signify an appointed time. For thus they understand that passage, Job 7, 1, Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? That is, his time is determinately appointed. But I receive it simply and according to the grammatical propriety as signifying warfare.

Wherefore you may understand Isaiah as speaking with reference to the race and labor of the people under the law who are, as it were, fighting on a platform. Hence Paul compares both the preachers and the hearers of the word to soldiers, as in the case of Timothy, 2 Timothy 2, 3, whom he commands to be a good soldier and to fight the good fight. And 1 Corinthians 9, 24, he represents them as running in a race and observes also that no one is crowned except he strive lawfully.

He equips the Ephesians and Thessalonians with arms, Ephesians 6, 10-18, and he glories himself that he had fought the good fight, 2 Timothy 4, 7, with many like instances in other places. So also at 1 Samuel 2, 22, it is in the Hebrew, And the sons of Eli slept with the women who fought, militantibus, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, of whose fighting Moses makes mention in Exodus. And hence it is that the god of the people is called the Lord of Sabaoth,

that is, the Lord of warfare and of armies.

Isaiah, therefore, is proclaiming that the warfare of the people under the law, who are pressed down under the law as a burden intolerable, as Peter saith, Acts 15, 7-10, is to be at an end, and that they being freed from the law are to be translated into the new warfare of the Spirit. Moreover, this end of their most hard warfare and this translation to the new and all-free warfare is not given unto them on account of their merit, seeing that they could not endure it. Nay, it is rather given unto them on account of their demerit, for their warfare is ended by their iniquities being freely forgiven them.

The words are not obscure or ambiguous here. He saith that their warfare was ended by their iniquities being forgiven them, manifestly signifying that the soldiers under the law did not fulfill the law and could not fulfill it, and that they only carried on a warfare of sin and were soldier-sinners, as though God had said, I am compelled to forgive them their sins if I would have my law fulfilled by them. Nay, I must take away my law entirely when I forgive them, for I see they cannot but sin.

And the more so, the more they fight, that is, the more they strive to fulfill the law by their own vowers. For in the Hebrew, her iniquity is pardoned, signifies its being done in gratuitous goodwill. And it is thus that the iniquity is pardoned without any merit, nay, under all demerit, as is shown in what follows, for she hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins, that is, as I said before, not only the remission of sins, but an end of the warfare, which is nothing more or less than this, the law being taken out of the way, which is the strength of sin, and their sin being pardoned, which is the sting of death.

They reign in a twofold liberty by the victory of Jesus Christ, which is what Isaiah means when he says, From the hand of the Lord. For they do not obtain it by their own powers or on account of their own merit, but they receive it from the Conqueror and Giver, Jesus Christ. And that which is, according to the Hebrew, in all her sins, is, according to the Latin, for all her sins, or on account of all her sins.

As in Hosea 12.12, Israel served in a wife, that is, for a wife. And so also in Psalm 59.3, They lay in wait in my soul, that is, for my soul. Isaiah, therefore, is here pointing out to us those merits of ours by which we imagine we are to obtain the twofold liberty, that of the end of the law warfare and that of the pardon of sin, making it appear to us that they were nothing but sins, nay, all sins.

Could I therefore suffer this most beautiful passage which stands invincible against free will, to be thus bedaubed with Jewish filth cast upon it by Jerome and the diatribe? God forbid, no. My Isaiah stands victor over free will and clearly shows that grace is given not to merits or to the endeavors of free will, but to sins and demerits, and that free will with all its powers can do nothing but carry on a warfare of sin, so that the very law which it imagines to be given as a help becomes intolerable to it and makes it the greater sinner the longer it is under its warfare. Section 116 But as to the diatribe disputing thus, Although sin abound by the law, and where sin has abounded grace much more abound, yet it does not therefore follow that man, doing by God's help what is pleasing to him, cannot by works morally good prepare himself for the favor of God.

Wonderful! Surely the diatribe does not speak this out of its own head, but has taken it out of some paper or other, sent or received from another quarter, and inserted it into its book. For it certainly can neither see nor hear the meaning of these words. If sin abound by the law, how is it possible

that a man can prepare himself by moral works for the favor of God? How can works avail anything when the law avails nothing? Or what else is it for sin to abound by the law but for all the works done according to the law to become sins? But of this elsewhere.

But what does it mean when it says that man, assisted by the help of God, can prepare himself by moral works? Are we here disputing concerning the divine assistance or concerning free will? For what is not possible through the divine assistance? But the fact is, as I said before, the diatribe cares nothing for the cause it has taken up, and therefore it snores and yawns forth such words as these. But, however, it adduces Cornelius the Centurion, Acts 10.31, as an example, observing that his prayers and alms pleased God before he was baptized and before he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. I have read Luke upon the Acts too, and yet I never perceived from one single syllable that the works of Cornelius were morally good without the Holy Spirit as the diatribe dreams.

But on the contrary, I find that he was a just man, one who feared God, for thus Luke calls him. But to call a man without the Holy Spirit a just man and one that feared God is the same thing as calling Baal Christ. Moreover, the whole context shows that Cornelius was clean before God, even upon the testimony of the vision which was sent down from heaven to Peter and which reproved him.

Are then the righteousness and faith of Cornelius set forth by Luke in such words and do the diatribe and its sophists remain blind with open eyes or see the contrary in a light of words and in evidence of circumstances so clear? Such is their want of diligence in reading and contemplating the Scriptures, and yet they must brand them with the assertion that they are obscure and ambiguous. But granted that he was not as yet baptized nor had as yet heard the word concerning Christ risen from the dead, does it therefore follow that he was without the Holy Spirit? According to this you will say that John the Baptist and his parents, the mother of Christ and Simeon, were without the Holy Spirit. But let us take leave of such thick darkness.

Section 117 The fourth passage is that of Isaiah in the same chapter. All flesh is grass, and all the glory of it as the flower of grass. The grass is withered, the flower of grass is fallen, because the Spirit of the Lord hath blown upon it.

Isaiah 46-7 This Scripture appears to my friend Diatribe to be treated with violence by being dragged in as applicable to the causes of grace and free will. Why so, I pray? Because, it says, Jerome understands spirit to signify indignation and flesh to signify the infirm condition of man which cannot stand against God. Here again the trifling vanities of Jerome are cast in my teeth instead of Isaiah.

And I find I have more to do in fighting against that wearisomeness with which the diatribe with so much diligence to use no harsher term wears me out than I have in fighting against the diatribe itself. But I have given my opinion upon the sentiment of Jerome already. Let me beg permission of the diatribe to compare this gentleman with himself.

He says that flesh signifies the infirm condition of man and spirit the divine indignation. Has then the divine indignation nothing else to wither but that miserable infirm condition of man which it ought rather to raise up? This, however, is more excellent still. The flower of grass is the glory which arises from the prosperity of corporal things.

The Jews gloried in their temple, their circumcision, and their sacrifices, and the Greeks in their wisdom. Therefore the flower of grass is the glory of the flesh, the righteousness of works, and the wisdom of the world. How then are righteousness and wisdom called by the diatribe corporal things? And after all, what have these to do with Isaiah who interprets his own meaning in his own words, saying, Surely the people is grass.

He does not say, Surely the infirm condition of man is grass, but the people, and affirms it with an asseveration. And what is the people? Is it the infirm condition of man only? But whether Jerome by the infirm condition of man means the whole creation together, or the miserable lot and state of man only, I am sure I know not. Be it however which it may, he certainly makes the divine indignation to gain a glorious renown and a noble spoil from withering a miserable creation, or a race of wretched men, and not rather from scattering the proud, pulling down the mighty from their seat, and sending the rich empty away, as Mary sings, Luke 1, 51-53.

Section 118 But let us dispatch these hobgoblins of glosses, and take Isaiah's words as they are. The people, he saith, is grass. People does not signify flesh merely, or the infirm condition of human nature, but it comprehends everything that there is in people, the rich, the wise, the just, the saints, unless you mean to say that the Pharisees, the elders, the princes, the nobles, and the rich men were not of the people of the Jews.

The flower of grass is rightly called their glory, because it was in their kingdom, their government, and above all in the law, in God, in righteousness, and in wisdom, that they gloried, as Paul shows, Romans 2, 3, and 9. When, therefore, Isaiah saith, All flesh, what else does he mean but all grass, or all people? For he does not say flesh only, but all flesh, and to people belong soul, body, mind, reason, judgment, and whatever is called or found to be most excellent in man. For when he says, All flesh is grass, he accepts nothing but the spirit which withereth it. Nor does he omit anything when he says, The people is grass.

Speak, therefore, of free will, speak of anything that can be called the highest or the lowest in the people. Isaiah calls the whole flesh and grass, because those three terms, flesh, grass, and people, according to his interpretation, who is himself the writer of the book, signify in that place the same thing. Moreover, you yourself affirm that the wisdom of the Greeks and the righteousness of the Jews which were withered by the gospel were grass, and the flower of grass.

Do you then think that the wisdom which the Greeks had was not the most excellent, and that the righteousness which the Jews wrought was not the most excellent? If you do, show us what was more excellent. With what assurance, then, is it that you, Philip-like, flout and say, If anyone shall contend that that which is most excellent in the nature of man is nothing else but flesh, that is, that it is impious, I will agree with him when he shall have proved his assertion by testimonies from the Holy Scripture. You have here Isaiah, who cries with a loud voice that the people, devoid of the spirit of the Lord, is flesh, although you will not understand him thus.

You have also your own confession, where you said, though unwittingly perhaps, that the wisdom of the Greeks was grass, or the glory of grass, which is the same thing as saying it was flesh, unless you mean to say that the wisdom of the Greeks did not pertain to reason, or to the hegemonicon, as you say, that is, the principal part of man. If, therefore, you will not deign to listen to me, listen to yourself, where, being caught in the powerful trap of truth, you speak the truth. You

have, moreover, the testimony of John, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.

John 3, 6. You have, I say, this passage, which makes it evidently manifest that what is not born of the spirit is flesh. For if it be not so, the distinction of Christ could not subsist, who divides all men into two distinct divisions, flesh and spirit. This passage you floutingly pass by, as if it did not give you the information you want, and betake yourself somewhere else, as usual, just dropping, as you go along, an observation that John is here saying that those who believe are born of God and are made the sons of God, nay, that they are gods and new creatures.

You pay no regard, therefore, to the conclusion that is to be drawn from this division, but merely tell us at your ease what persons are on one side of the division, thus confidently relying upon your rhetorical maneuver as though there were no one likely to discover an evasion and dissimulation so subtly managed. Section 119. It is difficult to refrain from concluding that you are in this passage crafty in double dealing.

For he who treats of the Scriptures with that prevarication and hypocrisy which you practice in treating of them may have face enough to pretend that he is not as yet fully acquainted with the Scriptures and is willing to be taught, when at the same time he wills nothing less, and merely prates thus in order to cast a reproach upon the all-clear light of the Scriptures and to cover with the best cloak his determinate perseverance in his own opinions. Thus the Jews, even to this day, pretend that what Christ, the apostles, and the whole Church have taught is not to be proved by the Scriptures. The Papists, too, pretend that they do not yet fully understand the Scriptures, although the very stones speak aloud the truth.

But perhaps you are waiting for a passage to be produced from the Scriptures which shall contain these letters and syllables, the principal part of man is flesh, or that which is most excellent in man is flesh. Otherwise you will declare yourself an invincible victor, just as though the Jews should require that a portion be produced from the prophets which shall consist of these letters. Jesus, the son of the carpenter, who was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Here, where you are closely put to it by a plain sentence, you challenge us to produce letters and syllables. In another place, where you are overcome both by the sentence and by the letters, too, you have recused to tropes, to difficulties, and to sound interpretations. And there is no place in which you do not invent something whereby to contradict the Scriptures.

At one time you fly to the interpretations of the Fathers, at another to absurdities of reason, and when neither of these will serve your turn you dwell on that which is irrelevant or contingent. Yet with an especial care that you are not caught by the passage immediately in point. But what shall I call you? Proteus is not half a proteus compared to you.

Yet, after all, you cannot get off. What victories did the Arians boast of because these syllables and letters, homoousios, were not to be found in the Scriptures? Considering it nothing to the purpose that the same thing could be most effectually proved in other words. But whether or not this be a sign of a good, not to say pious, mind, and a mind desiring to be taught, let impiety or iniquity itself be judged.

Take your victory, then, while we as the vanquished confess that these characters and syllables, that which is most excellent in man is nothing but flesh, is not to be found in the Scriptures. But just behold what a victory you have gained when we most abundantly prove that though it is not found in the Scriptures that one detached portion, or that which is most excellent, or the principal part of man is flesh, but that the whole of man is flesh. And not only so, but that the whole people is flesh.

And further still, that the whole human race is flesh. For Christ saith, That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Do you here set about your difficulty solving, your trope inventing, and searching for the interpretations of the fathers, or, turning quite another way, enter upon a dissertation on the Trojan War, in order to avoid seeing and hearing this passage now adduced? We do not believe only, but see and experience that the whole human race is born of the flesh, and therefore we are compelled to believe upon the word of Christ that which we do not see, that the whole human race is flesh.

Do we now then give the sophists any room to doubt and dispute whether or not the principal hegemonica part of a man be comprehended in the whole man, in the whole people, in the whole race of men? We know, however, that in the whole human race both the body and soul are comprehended, together with all their powers and works, with all their vices and virtues, with all their wisdom and folly, with all their righteousness and unrighteousness. All things are flesh, because all things savour of the flesh, that is, of their own, and are, as Paul saith, without the glory of God and the Spirit of God. Romans 3.23.8.5-9 Section 120 And as to your saying, Yet every affection of man is not flesh, there is an affection called soul, there is an affection called spirit, by which we aspire to what is meritoriously good, as the philosophers aspired, who taught that we should rather die a thousand deaths than commit one base action, even though we were assured that men would never know it and that God would pardon it.

I answer, He who believes nothing certainly may easily believe and say anything. I will not ask you, but let your friend Lucian ask you, whether you can bring forward anyone out of the whole human race. Let him be twofold or sevenfold greater than Socrates himself, whoever performed this of which you speak and which you say they taught.

Why then do you thus babble in vanities of words? Could they ever aspire to that which is meritoriously good who did not even know what good is? If I should ask you for some of the brightest examples of your meritorious good, you would say, perhaps, that it was meritoriously good when men died for their country, for their wives and children, and for their parents, or when they refrained from lying or from treachery, or when they endured exquisite torments, as did Q. Sivola, M. Regulus, and others. But what can you point out in all those men but an external show of works? For did you ever see their hearts? Nay, it was manifest from the very appearance of their works that they did all these things for their own glory, so much so that they were not even ashamed to confess and to boast that they sought their own glory. For the Romans, according to their own testimonies, did whatever they did of virtue or valor from a thirst after glory.

The same did the Greeks, the same did the Jews, and the same do all the race of men. But though this be meritoriously good before men, yet before God nothing is less meritoriously good than all this. Nay, it is most impious and the greatest of sacrilege, because they did it not for the glory of God, nor that they might glorify God, but with the most impious of all robbery.

For as they were robbing God of His glory and taking it to themselves, they never were farther from meritorious good, never more base than when they were shining in their most exalted virtues. How could they do what they did for the glory of God when they neither knew God nor His glory? Not, however, because it did not appear, but because the flesh did not permit them to see the glory of God from their fury and madness after their own glory. This, therefore, is that right-ruling spirit, that principal part of man which aspires to what is meritoriously good.

It is a plunderer of the divine glory, and an usurper of the divine majesty, and then the most so when men are at the highest of their meritorious good, and the most glittering in their brightest virtues. Deny, therefore, if you can, that these are flesh and carried away by an impious affection. But I do not believe that the diatribe can be so much offended at the expression where man is said to be either flesh or spirit, because a Latin would here say man is either carnal or spiritual.

For this particularly, as well as many others, must be granted to the Hebrew tongue, that when it says man is flesh or spirit, its signification is the same as ours is when we say man is carnal or spiritual. The same signification which the Latins also convey when they say the wolf is destructive to the foals, moisture is favorable to the young corn, or when they say this fellow is iniquity and evil itself. So also the Holy Scripture, by a force of expression, calls man flesh, that is, carnality itself, because it savors too much of, nay of nothing but, those things which are of the flesh, and spirit, because he savors of, seeks, does, and can endure nothing but those things which are of the spirit.

Unless perhaps the diatribe should still make this remaining query, supposing the whole of man to be flesh, and that which is most excellent in man to be called flesh, must therefore that which is called flesh be at once called ungodly? I call him ungodly who is without the Spirit of God, for the Scripture saith that the Spirit was therefore given that he might justify the ungodly, and as Christ makes a distinction between the spirit and the flesh, saying that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and adds that that which is born of the flesh cannot see the kingdom of God, John 3, 3-6, it evidently follows that whatsoever is flesh is ungodly, under the wrath of God, and a stranger to the kingdom of God. And if it be a stranger to the kingdom of God, it necessarily follows that it is under the kingdom and spirit of Satan. For there is no medium between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

They are mutually and eternally opposed to each other. These are the arguments that prove that the most exalted virtues among the nations, the highest perfections of the philosophers, and the greatest excellencies among men, appear indeed in the sight of men to be meritoriously virtuous and good, and are so called, but that in the sight of God they are in truth flesh, and subservient to the kingdom of Satan, that is ungodly, sacrilegious, and in every respect evil. Section 121 But pray, let us suppose the sentiment of the diatribe to stand good, that every affection is not flesh, that is ungodly, but is that which is called good in sound spirit.

Only observe what absurdity must hence follow, not only with respect to human reason, but with respect to the Christian religion, and the most important articles of faith. For if that which is most excellent in man be not ungodly, nor utterly depraved, nor damnable, but that which is flesh only, that is, the grosser and viler affections, what sort of a redeemer shall we make Christ? Shall we rate the price of his blood so low as to say that it redeemed that part of man only which is the most vile, and that the most excellent part of man has power to work its own salvation, and does not

want Christ? Henceforth, then, I must preach Christ as the redeemer, not of the whole man, but of his vilest part, that is, of his flesh, but that the man himself is his own redeemer in his better part. Have it therefore which way you will.

If the better part of man be sound, it does not want Christ as a redeemer, and if it does not want Christ, it triumphs in a glory above that of Christ, for it takes care of the redemption of the better part itself, whereas Christ only takes care of that of the vilest part. And then, moreover, the kingdom of Satan will come to nothing at all, for it will reign only in the viler part of man, because the man himself will rule over the better part. So that by this doctrine of yours concerning the principal part of man, it will come to pass that man will be exalted above Christ and the devil both, that is, he will be made God of gods and Lord of lords.

Where is now that probable opinion which asserted that free will cannot will anything good? It here contends that it is a principal part, meritoriously good and sound, and that it does not even want Christ, but can do more than God himself and the devil can do put together. I say this that you may again see how eminently perilous a matter it is to attempt sacred and divine things without the Spirit of God and the temerity of human reason. If therefore Christ be the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, it follows that the whole world is under sin, damnation, and the devil.

Hence your distinction between the principal parts and the parts not principal profits you nothing. For the world signifies men savoring of nothing but the things of the world throughout all their faculties. Section 122 If the whole man, says the diatribe, even when regenerated by faith is nothing else but flesh, where is the spirit born of the spirit? Where is the child of God? Where is the new creature? I want information upon these points.

Thus the diatribe. Where now, where now, my dear friend, diatribe? What dream now? You demand to be informed how the spirit, born of the spirit, can be flesh? Oh, how elated! How secure of victory do you insultingly put this question to me as though it were impossible for me to stand my ground here. All this while you are abusing the authority of the ancients.

For they say that there are certain seeds of good implanted in the minds of men. But, however, whether you use or whether abuse the authority of the ancients, it is all one to me. You will see by and by what you believe, when you believe men prating out of their own brain without the word of God.

Though perhaps your care about religion does not give you much concern as to what anyone believes, since you so easily believe men without at all regarding whether or not that which they say be certain or uncertain in the sight of God. And I also wish to be informed when I ever taught that with which you so freely and publicly charge me. Who would be so mad as to say that he who is born of the spirit is nothing but flesh? I make a manifest distinction between flesh and spirit as things that directly militate against each other.

And I say, according to the divine oracles, that the man who is not regenerated by faith is flesh. But I say that he who is thus regenerated is no longer flesh, excepting as to the remnants of the flesh which wore against the first fruits of the spirit received. Nor do I suppose you wish to attempt to charge me invidiously with anything wrong here.

If you do, there is no charge that you could more iniquitously bring against me. But you either understand nothing of my side of the subject, or else you find yourself unequal to the magnitude of the cause by which you are perhaps so overwhelmed and confounded that you do not rightly know what you say against me or for yourself. For where you declare it to be your belief upon the authority of the ancients that there are certain seeds of good implanted in the minds of men, you must surely quite forget yourself.

Because you before asserted that free will cannot will anything good. And how cannot will anything good and certain seeds of good can stand in harmony together I know not. Thus I am perpetually compelled to remind you of the subject design with which you set out, from which you with perpetual forgetfulness depart and take up something contrary to your professed purpose.

Section 123 Another passage is that of Jeremiah 10.23 I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. This passage, says the diatribe, rather applies to the events of prosperity than to the power of free will.

Here again the diatribe, with its usual audacity, introduces a gloss according to its own pleasure, as though the scripture were fully under its control. But in order to anyone's considering the sense and intent of the prophet, what need was there for the opinion of a man of so great authority? Erasmus says so, it is enough, it must be so. If this liberty of glossing as they lust be permitted the adversaries, what point is there which they might not carry? Let, therefore, Erasmus show us the validity of this gloss from the scope of the context, and we will believe him.

I, however, will show from the scope of the context that the prophet, when he saw that he taught the ungodly with so much earnestness in vain, was at once convinced that his word could avail nothing unless God should teach them within, and that, therefore, it was not in man to hear the word of God and to will good. Seeing this judgment of God, he was alarmed and asked of God that he would correct him but with judgment if he had need to be corrected, and that he might not be given up to his divine wrath with the ungodly, whom he suffered to be hardened and to remain in unbelief. But let us suppose that the passage is to be understood concerning the events of adversity and prosperity.

What will you say if this gloss should go most directly to overthrow free will? This new evasion is invented indeed that ignorant and lazy deceivers may consider it satisfactory, the same which they also had in view who invented that evasion the necessity of the consequence. And so drawn away are they by these newly invented terms that they do not see that they are, by these evasions, tenfold more effectually entangled and caught than they would have been without them. As in the present instance, if the event of these things which are temporal and over which man, Genesis 1, 26-30, was constituted Lord, be not in our own power, how, I pray you, can that heavenly thing, the grace of God, which depends on the will of God alone, be in our own power? Can that endeavor of free will attain unto eternal salvation which is not able to retain a farthing or a hair of the head? When we have no power to obtain the creature, shall it be said that we have power to obtain the Creator? What madness is this? The endeavoring of man, therefore, unto good or unto evil, when applied to events, is a thousandfold more enormous, because he is in both much more deceived and has much less liberty than he has in striving after money or glory or pleasure.

What an excellent evasion is this gloss, then, which denies the liberty of man in trifling and created events and preaches it up in the greatest and divine events. This is as if one should say, Codrus is not able to pay a groat, but he is able to pay thousands and thousands of pounds. I am astonished that the diatribe, having all along so invaded against that tenet of Wycliffe that all things take place of necessity, should now itself grant that events come upon us of necessity.

And even if you do, says the diatribe, forcibly twist this to apply to free will, all confess that no one can hold on a right course of life without the grace of God. Nevertheless, we still strive ourselves with all our powers, for we pray daily, O Lord my God, direct my goings in thy sight. He, therefore, who implores aid, does not lay aside his own endeavors.

The diatribe thinks that it matters not what it answers so that it does not remain silent with nothing to say, and then it would have what it does say to appear satisfactory. Such a vain confidence has it in its own authority. It ought here to have proved whether or not we strive by our own powers, whereas it proved that he who prays attempts something.

But, I pray, is it here laughing at us, or mocking the Papists? For he who prays, prays by the Spirit. Nay, it is the Spirit himself that prays in us. Romans 8, 26-27 How then is the power of free will proved by the strivings of the Holy Spirit? Are free will and the Holy Spirit with the diatribe one and the same thing? Or are we disputing now about what the Holy Spirit can do? The diatribe, therefore, leaves me this passage of Jeremiah uninjured and invincible, and only produces the gloss out of its own brain.

I also can strive by my own powers, and Luther will be compelled to believe this gloss if he will. Section 124 There is that passage of Proverbs 16, 1 and 9 also. It is of man to prepare the heart, but of the Lord to govern the tongue, which the diatribe says refers to events of things, as though this the diatribe's own saying would satisfy us without any further authority.

But, however, it is quite sufficient that allowing the sense of these passages to be concerning the events of things, we have evidently come off victorious by the arguments which we have just advanced, that if we have no such thing as freedom of will in our own things and works, much less have we any such thing in divine things and works. But mark the great acuteness of the diatribe. How can it be of man to prepare the heart when Luther affirms that all things are carried on by necessity? I answer, if the events of things be not in our power, as you say, how can it be in man to perform the causing acts? The same answer which you gave me, the same receive yourself.

Nay, we are commanded to work the more for this very reason, because all things future are to us uncertain, as saith Ecclesiastes, In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening hold not thine hand, for thou knowest not which shall prosper, either this or that, Ecclesiastes 11.6. All things future, I say, are to us uncertain in knowledge, but necessary in event. The necessity strikes into us a fear of God that we presume not or become secure, while the uncertainty works in us a trusting that we sink not in despair. But the diatribe returns to harping upon its old string, that in the book of Proverbs many things are said in confirmation of free will, as this, Commit thy works unto the Lord.

Do thou hear this, says the diatribe, thy works? Many things in confirmation? What, because there are in that book many imperative and conditional verbs and pronouns of the second person? For it is upon these foundations that you build your proof of the freedom of the will. Thus commit,

therefore thou canst commit thy works. Therefore thou doest them.

So also this passage, I am thy God, Isaiah 41.10, you will understand thus. That is, thou makest me thy God. Thy faith hath saved thee, Luke 7.50. Do you hear this word, thy? Therefore expound it thus.

Thou makest thy faith. And then you have proved free will. Nor am I merely game-making, but I am showing the diatribe that there is nothing serious on its side of the subject.

This passage also in the same chapter, The Lord hath made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. Proverbs 16.4 It modifies by its own words and excuses God as having never created a creature evil. As though I had spoken concerning the creation and not rather concerning that continual operation of God upon the things created, in which operation God acts upon the wicked, as we have before shown in the case of Pharaoh.

But he creates the wicked not by creating wickedness, or a wicked creature, which is impossible, but from the operation of God a wicked man is made, or created, from a corrupt seed, not from the fault of the maker, but from that of the material. Nor does that of The heart of the king is in the Lord's hand, and he inclineth it whithersoever he will, Proverbs 21.1, seem to the diatribe to imply force. He who inclines, it observes, does not immediately compel, as though we were speaking of compulsion and not rather concerning the necessity of immutability.

And that is implied in the inclining of God, which inclining is not so snoring and lazy a thing as the diatribe imagines, but is that most active operation of God which a man cannot avoid or alter, but under which he has of necessity such a will as God has given him, and such as he carries along by his motion, as I have before shown. Moreover, where Solomon is speaking of the king's heart, the diatribe thinks that the passage cannot rightly be strained to apply in a general sense, but that the meaning is the same as that of Job, where he says in another place he maketh the hypocrite to reign because of the sins of the people. At last, however, it concedes that the king is inclined unto evil by God, but so that he permits the king to be carried away by his inclination in order to chastise the people.

I answer, whether God permit or whether he incline, that permitting or inclining does not take place without the will and operation of God, because the will of the king cannot avoid the action of the omnipotent God, seeing that the will of all is carried along just as he wills and acts, whether that will be good or evil. And as to my having made out of the particular will of the king a general application, I did it, I presume, neither vainly nor unskillfully. For if the heart of the king, which seems to be of all the most free and to rule over others, cannot will good but where God inclines it, how much less can any other among men will good.

And this conclusion will stand valid, drawn not from the will of a king only, but from that of any other man. For if any one man, how private soever he be, cannot will before God but where God inclines, the same must be said of all men. Thus in the instance of Balaam, his not being able to speak what he wished is an evident argument from the scriptures that man is not in his own power, nor a free chooser and doer of what he does.

Were it not so, no examples of it could subsist in the scriptures.

## 10 - Sections 126-134: Discussion, Part II-d

---

Sections 126 through 134 of *The Bondage of the Will*, by Martin Luther, translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain. Discussion, second part, concluded.

Section 126. The diatribe after this, having said that many such testimonies as Luther collects may be collected out of the Book of Proverbs, but which, by a convenient interpretation, may stand both for and against free will, adduces at last that Achillean and invincible weapon of Luther, Without me ye can do nothing, and so forth. John 15, 5. I, too, must laud that notable champion disputant for free will, who teaches us to modify the testimonies of Scripture just as it serves our turn by convenient interpretations, in order to make them appear to stand truly in confirmation of free will, that is, that they might be made to prove not what they ought, but what we please, and who merely pretends a fear of one Achillean scripture, that the silly reader, seeing this one overthrown, might hold all the rest in utter contempt.

But I will just look on and see, by what force the full-mouthed and heroic diatribe will conquer my Achilles, which hitherto has never wounded a common soldier, nor even a Thersites, but has never miserably dispatched itself with its own weapons. Catching hold of this one word, nothing, it stabs it with many words and many examples, and by means of a convenient interpretation brings it to this, that nothing may signify that which is in degree and imperfect, that is, it means to say, in other words, that the sophists have hitherto explained this passage thus, without me you can do nothing, that is, perfectly. This gloss, which has been long worn out and obsolete, the diatribe, by its own power of rhetoric, renders new, and so presses it forward as though it had first invented it, and it had never been heard before, thus making it appear to be a sort of miracle.

In the meantime, however, it is quite self-secure, thinking nothing about the text itself, nor what precedes or follows it, whence alone the knowledge of the passage is to be obtained. But to say no more about its having attempted to prove by so many words and examples, that the term nothing may in this passage be understood as meaning that which is in a certain degree, or imperfect, as though we were disputing whether or not it may be, whereas what was to be proved is whether or not it ought to be so understood, the whole of this grand interpretation affects nothing if it affects anything but this, the rendering of this passage of John uncertain and obscure. And no wonder, for all that the diatribe aims at is to make the scriptures of God in every place obscure, to the intent that it might not be compelled to use them, and the authorities of the ancients certain to the intent that it might abuse them, a wonderful kind of religion truly, making the words of God to be useless and the words of man useful.

Section 127. But it is most excellent to observe how well this gloss nothing may be understood to signify that which is in degree consists with itself. Yet the diatribe says that in this sense of the passage, it is most true that we can do nothing without Christ, because he is speaking of evangelical fruits which cannot be produced but by those who remain in the vine which is Christ.

Here the diatribe itself confesses that fruit cannot be produced but by those who remain in the vine, and it does the same in that convenient interpretation by which it proves that nothing is the same as in degree and imperfect. But perhaps its own adverb cannot, ought also to be conveniently interpreted, so as to signify that evangelical fruits can be produced without Christ in degree and imperfectly, so that we may preach that the ungodly who are without Christ can, while Satan reigns in them and wars against Christ, produce some of the fruits of life. That is, that the enemies of Christ may do something for the glory of Christ.

But away with these things. Here, however, I should like to be taught how are we to resist heretics who, using this rule throughout the scriptures, may contend that nothing and not are to be understood as signifying that which is imperfect. Thus, without him nothing can be done, that is, a little.

The fool hath said in his heart there is not a God, that is, there is an imperfect God. He hath made us and not we ourselves, that is, we did a little towards making ourselves. And who can number all the passages in the scripture where nothing and not are found? Shall we then here say that a convenient interpretation is to be attended to, and is this clearing up difficulties to open such a door of liberty to corrupt minds and deceiving spirits? Such a license of interpretation is, I grant, convenient to you who care nothing whatsoever about the certainty of the scripture.

But as for me, who labor to establish consciences, this is an inconvenience than which nothing can be more inconvenient, nothing more injurious, nothing more pestilential. Hear me, therefore, thou great conqueress of the Lutheran Achilles. Unless you shall prove that nothing, not only may be, but ought to be understood as signifying a little, you have done nothing by all this profusion of words or examples but fight against fire with dry straw.

What have I to do with your may be, which only demands of you to prove your ought to be? And if you do not prove that, I stand by the natural and grammatical signification of the term, laughing both at your armies and at your triumphs. Where is now that probable opinion which determined that free will can will nothing good? But perhaps the convenient interpretation comes in here, to say that nothing good signifies something good, a kind of grammar and logic never before heard of, that nothing is the same as something, which with logicians is an impossibility because they are contradictions. Where now then remains that article of our faith, that Satan is the prince of the world, and, according to the testimonies of Christ and Paul, rules in the wills and minds of those men who are his captives and servants? Shall that roaring lion, that implacable and ever restless enemy of the grace of God and the salvation of man, suffer it to be that man, his slave and a part of his kingdom, should attempt good by any motion in any degree, whereby he might escape from his tyranny, and that he should not rather spur and urge him on to will and to do the contrary to grace with all his powers, especially when the just and those who are led by the Spirit of God and who will and do good can hardly resist him, so great is his rage against them? You who make it out that the human will is a something placed in a free medium and left to itself, certainly make it out at the same time that there is an endeavor which can exert itself either way, because you make both God and the devil to be at a distance, spectators only, as it were, of this mutable and free will, though you do not believe that they are impellers and agitators of that bondage will, the most hostilely opposed to each other.

Admitting therefore this part of your faith only, my sentiment stands firmly established, and free will lies prostrate, as I have shown already. For it must either be, that the kingdom of Satan in man is nothing at all, and thus Christ will be made to lie, or, if his kingdom be such as Christ describes, free will must be nothing but a beast of burden, the captive of Satan, which cannot be liberated unless the devil be first cast out by the finger of God. From what has been advanced, I presume, friend diatribe, thou fully understandest what that is, and what it amounts to, where thy author, detesting the obstinate way of assertion in Luther, is accustomed to say, Luther indeed pushes his cause with plenty of scriptures, but they may all by one word be brought to nothing.

Who does not know that all scriptures may by one word be brought to nothing? I knew this full well before I ever heard the name of Erasmus. But the question is, whether it be sufficient to bring a scripture by one word to nothing. The point in dispute is, whether it be rightly brought to nothing, and whether it ought to be brought to nothing.

Let a man consider these points, and he will then see whether or not it be easy to bring scriptures to nothing, and whether or not the obstinacy of Luther be detestable. He will then see that not one word only is ineffective, but all the gates of hell cannot bring them to nothing. Section 128.

What therefore the diatribe cannot do in its affirmative, it will do in the negative. And though I am not called upon to prove the negative, yet I will do it here, and will make it by the force of argument undeniably appear that nothing in this passage not only may be but ought to be understood as meaning not a certain small degree, but that which the term naturally signifies. And this I will do in addition to that invincible argument by which I am already victorious, namely, that all terms are to be preserved in their natural signification and use unless the contrary shall be proved, which the diatribe neither has done nor can do.

First of all, then, I will make that evidently manifest which is plainly proved by scriptures neither ambiguous nor obscure, that Satan is by far the most powerful and crafty prince of this world, as I said before, under the reigning power of whom the human will be no longer free nor in its own power, but the servant of sin and of Satan can will nothing but that which its prince wills, and he will not permit it to will anything good. Though even if Satan did not reign over it, sin itself, of which man is the slave, would sufficiently harden it to prevent it from willing good. Moreover, the following part of the context itself evidently proves the same, which the diatribe proudly sneers at, although I have commented upon it pericopiously in my assertions.

For Christ proceeds thus, John 15, 6, Whoso abideth not in me is cast forth as a branch and is withered, and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. This, I say, the diatribe, in a most excellent rhetorical way, passed by, hoping that the intent of this evasion would not be comprehended by the shallow-brained Lutherans. But here you see that Christ, who is the interpreter of his own similitude of the vine and the branch, plainly declares what he would have understood by the term nothing, that man who is without Christ is cast forth and is withered.

And what can the being cast forth and withered signify, but the being delivered up to the devil, and becoming continually worse and worse? And surely becoming worse and worse is not doing or attempting anything good. The withering branch is more and more prepared for the fire the more it withers. And had not Christ himself thus amplified and applied this similitude, no one would have dared so to amplify and apply it.

It stands manifest, therefore, that nothing ought in this place to be understood in its proper signification, according to the nature of the term. Section 129. Let us now consider the examples also by which it proves that nothing signifies in some places a certain small degree, in order that we may make it evident that the diatribe is nothing, and affects nothing in this part of it, in which, though it should do much, yet it would affect nothing.

Such a nothing is the diatribe in all things and in every way. It says, Generally, he is said to do nothing who does not achieve that at which he aims, and yet, for the most part, he who attempts it makes some certain degree of progress in the attempt. I answer, I never heard this general usage of the term.

You have invented it by your own license. The words are to be considered according to the subject matter, as they say, and according to the intention of the speaker. No one calls that nothing, which he does in attempting, nor does he then speak of the attempt, but of the effect.

It is to this the person refers when he says he does nothing or he affects nothing, that is, achieves and accomplishes nothing. But, supposing your example to stand good, which, however, it does not, it makes more for me than for yourself, for this is what I maintain, and would invincibly establish, that free will does many things, which nevertheless are nothing before God. What does it profit, therefore, to attempt, if it affect nothing at which it aims? So that, let the diatribe turn which way it will, it only runs against and confutes itself, which generally happens to those who undertake to support a bad cause.

With the same unhappy effect does it adduce that example out of Paul, neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God who giveth the increase, 1 Corinthians 3.7. That, says the diatribe, which is of the least moment and useless of itself, he calls nothing. Who? Do you pretend to say that the ministry of the Word is of itself useless, and of the least moment, when Paul everywhere, and especially in 2 Corinthians 3.6-9, highly exalts it, and calls it the ministration of life and of glory? Here, again, you neither consider the subject matter nor the intention of the speaker. As to the gift of the increase, the planter and the waterer are certainly nothing, but as to the planting and sowing they are not nothing, seeing that to teach and to exhort are the greatest work of the Spirit in the Church of God.

This is the intended meaning of Paul, and this his words convey with satisfactory plainness. But be it so that this ridiculous example stands good, again it stands in favour of me, for what I maintain is this, that free will is nothing, that is, is useless of itself as you expound it before God, and it is concerning its being nothing as to what it can do of itself that we are now speaking. For as to what it essentially is in itself, we know that an impious will must be a something, and cannot be a mere nothing.

There is also that of 1 Corinthians 13.2, If I have not charity I am nothing. Why the diatribe adduces this as an example I cannot see, unless it seeks only numbers and forces, or thinks that we have no arms at all by which we can effectually wound it. For he who is without charity is truly and properly nothing before God.

The same also we say of free will. Wherefore this example also stands for us against the diatribe. Or can it be that the diatribe does not yet know the argument ground upon which I am contending? I am not speaking about the essence of nature, but the essence of grace as they term it.

I know that free will can by nature do something, it can eat, drink, beget, rule, and so forth. Nor need the diatribe laugh at me as having prating frenzy enough to imply, when I press home so closely the term nothing, that free will cannot even sin without Christ, whereas Luther nevertheless says that free will can do nothing but sin. But so it pleases the wise diatribe to play the fool in a matter so serious.

For I say that man without the grace of God remains nevertheless under the general omnipotence of the acting God, who moves and carries along all things of necessity in the course of his infallible motion. But that the man's being thus carried along is nothing, that is, avails nothing in the sight of God, nor is considered anything else but sin. Thus in grace he that is without love is nothing.

Why then does the diatribe, when it confesses itself that we are here speaking of evangelical fruits, as that which cannot be produced without Christ, turn aside immediately from the subject point, harp upon another string, and cavil about nothing but natural works and human fruits? Except it be to evince that he who is devoid of the truth is never consistent with himself. So also that of John 3.27, a man can receive nothing except it were given him from above. John is here speaking of man who is now a something, and denies that this man can receive anything, that is, the spirit with his gifts.

For it is in reference to that he is speaking, not in reference to nature. For he did not want the diatribe as an instructor to teach him that man has already eyes, nose, ears, mouth, hands, mind, will, reason, and all things that belong to man. Unless the diatribe believes that the Baptist, when he made mention of man, was thinking of the chaos of Plato, the vacuum of Lucipus, or the infinity of Aristotle, or some other nothing which by a gift from heaven should at least be made a something, is this producing examples out of the scripture, thus to trifle designedly in a matter so important? And to what purpose is all that profusion of words where it teaches us that fire, the escape from evil, the endeavor after good, and other things are from heaven, as though there were any one who did not know or who denied those things? We are now talking about grace, and, as the diatribe itself said, concerning Christ and evangelical fruits, whereas it is itself making out its time in fabling about nature, thus dragging out the cause and covering the witless reader with a cloud.

In the meantime, it does not produce one single example as it professed to do wherein nothing is to be understood as signifying some small degree. Nay, it openly exposes itself as neither understanding nor caring what Christ or grace is, nor how it is that grace is one thing and nature another, when even the sophists of the meanest rank know and have continually taught this difference in their schools in the most common way. Nor does it all the while see that every one of its examples make for me and against itself, for the word of the Baptist goes to establish this, that man can receive nothing unless it be given him from above, and that therefore free will is nothing at all.

Thus it is, then, that my Achilles is conquered, the diatribe puts weapons into his hand by which it is itself dispatched, naked and weaponless, and thus it is also that the scriptures by which that obstinate asserter Luther urges his cause are by one word brought to nothing. Section 131. After this it enumerates a multitude of similitudes by which it affects nothing but the drawing aside the witless reader to irrelevant things, according to its custom, and at the same time leaves the subject point entirely out of the question.

Thus God indeed preserves the ship, but the mariner conducts it into harbour, wherefore the mariner does not do nothing. This similitude makes a difference of work, that is, it attributed that of preserving to God and that of conducting to the mariner, and thus if it prove anything it proves this, that the whole work of preserving is of God, and the whole work of conducting of the mariner, and yet it is a beautiful and apt similitude. Thus again the husbandman gathers in the increase, but it was God that gave it.

Here again it attributes different operations to God and to man, unless it mean to make the husbandman the creator also who gave the increase. But even supposing the same works be attributed to God and to man, what do these similitudes prove? Nothing more than that the creature co-operates with the operating God. But are we now disputing about co-operation, and not rather concerning the power and operation of free will as of itself? Whither, therefore, has the renowned rhetorician betaken himself? He set out with a professed design to dispute concerning a palm, whereas all his discourses have been about a gourd.

A noble vase was designed by the potter. Why then is a pitcher produced at last? I also know very well that Paul co-operates with God in teaching the Corinthians while he preaches without and God teaches within, and that where their works are different, and that in like manner he co-operates with God while he speaks by the Spirit of God, and that where the work is the same. For what I assert and contend for is this, that God, where he operates without the grace of his Spirit, works all in all, even in the ungodly, while he alone moves, acts on, and carries along by the motion of his omnipotence all those things which he alone has created, which motion those things can neither avoid nor change, but of necessity follow and obey, each one according to the measure of power given of God.

Thus all things, even the ungodly, co-operate with God. On the other hand, when he acts by the Spirit of his grace on those whom he has justified, that is, in his own kingdom, he moves and carries them along in the same manner, and they, as they are the new creatures, follow and co-operate with him, or rather, as Paul saith, are led by him, Romans 8, 14, and 30. But the present is not the place for discussing these points.

We are not now considering what we can do in co-operation with God, but what we can do of ourselves, that is, whether created as we are out of nothing, we can do or attempt anything of ourselves under the general motion of God's omnipotence, whereby to prepare ourselves unto the new creation of the Spirit. This is the point to which Erasmus ought to have answered, and not to have turned aside to something else. What I have to say upon this point is this.

As man, before he is created man, does nothing and endeavours nothing toward his being made a creature, and as, after he is made and created, he does nothing and endeavours nothing toward his preservation, or towards his continuing in his creature existence. But each takes place alone by the will of the omnipotent power and goodness of God, creating us and preserving us without ourselves. But as God nevertheless does not work in us without us, seeing we are for that purpose created and preserved, that he might work in us, and that we might co-operate with him, whether it be out of his kingdom under his general omnipotence, or in his kingdom under the peculiar power of his Spirit.

So man, before he is regenerated into the new creation of the kingdom of the Spirit, does nothing and endeavours nothing toward his new creation into that kingdom, and after he is recreated, does nothing and endeavours nothing toward his perseverance in that kingdom. But the Spirit alone affects both in us, regenerating us and preserving us when regenerated without ourselves. As James saith, of his own will beget he us by the word of his power, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

James 1.18, where he speaks of the renewed creation. Nevertheless he does not work in us without us, seeing that he has for this purpose created and preserved us, that he might operate in us, and that we might co-operate with him. Thus by us he preaches, shows mercy to the poor, and comforts the afflicted.

But what is hereby attributed to free will? Nay, what is there left of it but nothing at all? And in truth it is nothing at all. Section 132. Read therefore the diatribe in this part through five or six times, and you will find that by similitudes of this kind, and by some of the most beautiful passages and parables selected from the Gospel and from Paul, it does nothing else but show us that innumerable passages, as it observes, are to be found in the Scriptures which speak of the co-operation and assistance of God, from which, if I should draw this conclusion, man can do nothing without the assisting grace of God, therefore no works of man are good, it would on the contrary conclude, as it has done by a rhetorical inversion, nay, there is nothing that man cannot do by the assisting grace of God, therefore all the works of man can be good.

For as many passages as there are in the Holy Scriptures which make mention of assistance, so many are there which confirm free will, and they are innumerable. Therefore, if we go by the number of testimonies, the victory is mine. Do you think the diatribe could be sober, or in its right senses, when it wrote this? For I cannot attribute it to malice or iniquity, unless it be that it designed to effectually wear me out by perpetually wearying me, while thus ever like itself it is continually turning aside to something contrary to its professed design.

But if it is pleased thus to play the fool in a matter so important, then I will be pleased to expose its voluntary fooleries publicly. In the first place, I do not dispute, nor am I ignorant, that all the works of man may be good, if they be done by the assisting grace of God, and, moreover, that there is nothing which a man might not do by the assisting grace of God. But I cannot feel enough surprise at your negligence, who, having set out with the professed design to write upon the power of free will, go on writing about the power of grace, and, moreover, dare to assert publicly, as if all men were posts or stones, that free will is established by those passages of Scripture which exalt the grace of God.

And not only dare to do that, but even to sound forth encomiums on yourself as a victor most gloriously triumphant. From this very word and act of yours I truly perceive what free will is, and what the effect of it is. It makes men mad.

For what, I ask, can it be in you that talks at this rate but free will? But just listen to your own conclusions. The Scripture commends the grace of God, therefore it proves free will. It exalts the assistance of the grace of God, therefore it establishes free will.

By what kind of logic did you learn such conclusions as these? On the contrary, why not conclude thus? Grace is preached, therefore free will has no existence. The assistance of grace is exalted,

therefore free will is abolished. For to what extent is grace given? Is it for this that free will as being of sufficient power itself might proudly display and sport grace on fair days as a superfluous ornament? Wherefore I will invert your order of reasoning, and though no rhetorician will establish a conclusion more firm than yours.

As many places as there are in the Holy Scriptures which make mention of assistance, so many are there which abolish free will, and they are innumerable. Therefore if we are to go by the number of testimonies, the victory is mine. For grace is therefore needed, and the assistance of grace is therefore given, because free will can of itself do nothing, as Erasmus himself has asserted according to that probable opinion, that free will cannot will anything good.

Therefore when grace is commended, and the assurance of grace declared, the impotency of free will is declared at the same time. This is a sound inference, a firm conclusion, against which not even the gates of hell will ever prevail. Section 133.

Here I bring to a conclusion the defense of my scriptures which the diatribe attempted to refute, lest my book should be swelled to too great a bulk, and if there be anything yet remaining that is worthy of notice, it shall be taken into the following part, wherein I make my assertions. For as to what Erasmus says in his conclusion, that if my sentiments stand good, the numberless precepts, the numberless threatenings, the numberless promises are all in vain, and no place is left for merit or demerit, for rewards or punishments, that moreover it is difficult to defend the mercy, nay even the justice of God, if God damn sinners of necessity, and that many other difficulties follow, which have so troubled some of the greatest men, as even to utterly overthrow them. To all these things I have fully replied already, nor will I receive or bear with that moderate medium which Erasmus would, with a good intention I believe, recommend to me, that we should grant some certain little to free will, in order that the contradictions of the scripture and the difficulties before mentioned might be the more easily remedied.

For by this moderate medium the matter is not bettered, nor is any advantage gained whatever, because unless you ascribe the whole and all things to free will, as the Pelagians do, the contradictions in the scriptures are not altered, merit and reward are taken entirely away, the mercy and justice of God are abolished, and all the difficulties which we try to avoid by allowing this certain little ineffective power to free will, remains just as they were before, as I have already fully shown. Therefore we must come to the plain extreme, deny free will altogether, and ascribe all unto God. Thus there will be in the scriptures no contradictions, and if there be any difficulties they will be borne with, where they cannot be remedied.

Section 134. This one thing, however, my friend Erasmus, I entreat of you. Do not consider that I conduct this cause more according to my temper than according to my principles.

I will not suffer it to be insinuated that I am hypocrite enough to write one thing and believe another. I have not, as you say of me, been carried so far by the heat of defensive argument as to deny here free will altogether for the first time, having conceded something to it before. Confident I am that you can find no such concession anywhere in my works.

There are questions and discussions of mine extent in which I have continued to assert down to this hour that there is no such thing as free will, that it is a thing formed out of an empty term, which are the words I have there used. And I then thus believed and thus wrote as overpowered

by the force of truth when called and compelled to the discussion. And as to my always conducting discussions with ardor, I acknowledge my fault, if it be my fault.

Nay, I greatly glory in this testimony which the world bears of me in the cause of God. And may God himself confirm the same testimony in the last day. Then, who more happy than Luther to be honored with the universal testimony of his age that he did not maintain the cause of truth lazily nor deceitfully, but with a real, if not too great, ardor.

Then shall I be blessedly clear from that word of Jeremiah, Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully. Jeremiah 48.10. But if I seem to be somewhat more severe than usual upon your diatribe, pardon me. I do it not from a malignant heart, but from concern, because I know that by the weight of your name you greatly endanger this cause of Christ, though by your learning, as to real effect, you can do nothing at all.

And who can always so temper his pen as never to grow warm? For even you, who from a show of moderation grow almost cold in this book of yours, not unfrequently hurl a fiery and gall-dipped dart. So much so that if the reader were not very liberal in kind, he could not but consider you virulent. But, however, this is nothing to the subject point.

We must mutually pardon each other in these things, for we are but men, and there is nothing in us that is not touched with human infirmity. End of section 134

## 11 - Sections 135-145: Discussion, Part III-a

---

We are now arrived at the last part of this discussion, wherein I am, as I proposed, to bring forward my forces against free will. But I shall not produce them all, for who could do that within the limits of this small book, when the whole scripture, in every letter and iota, stands on my side? Nor is there any necessity for so doing, seeing that free will already lies vanquished and prostrate under a twofold overthrow. The one, where I have proved that all those things which it imagined made for itself, made directly against itself.

The other, where I have made it manifest that those scriptures which it attempted to refute still remain invincible. If, therefore, it had not been vanquished by the former, it is enough if it be laid prostrate by the one weapon or the other. And now, what need is there that the enemy, already dispatched by the one weapon or the other, should have his dead body stabbed with a number of weapons more? In this part, therefore, I shall be as brief as the subject will allow.

And from such numerous armies I shall produce only two champion generals, with a few of their legions, Paul and John the Evangelist. Section 135 Paul, writing to the Romans, thus enters upon his argument against free will and for the grace of God. The wrath of God, saith he, is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

Romans 1.18 Dost thou hear this general sentence, against all men? That they are all under the wrath of God. And what is this but declaring that they all merit wrath and punishment? For he assigns the cause of the wrath against them. They do nothing but that which merits wrath, because they are all ungodly and unrighteous, and hold the truth in unrighteousness.

Where is now the power of free will, which can endeavor anything good? Paul makes it to merit the wrath of God, and pronounces it ungodly and unrighteous. That therefore which merits wrath and is ungodly, only endeavors and avails against grace, not for grace. But someone will hear laugh at the yawning inconsiderateness of Luther, for not looking fully into the intention of Paul.

Someone will say that Paul does not here speak of all men, nor of all their doings, but of those only who are ungodly and unrighteous, and who, as the words themselves describe them, hold the truth in unrighteousness. But that it does not hence follow that all men are the same. Here I observe that in this passage of Paul the words, against all ungodliness of men, are of the same import as if you should say, against the ungodliness of all men.

For Paul, in almost all these instances, uses a Hebraism, so that the sense is, all men are ungodly and unrighteous, and hold the truth in unrighteousness. And therefore all merit wrath. Hence, in the Greek there is no relative, which might be rendered, of those who, but an article, causing the sense to run thus.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men holding the truth in unrighteousness. So that this may be taken as an epithet, as it were, applicable

to all men, as holding the truth in unrighteousness. Even as it is an epithet where it is said, our Father which art in heaven.

Which might, in other words, be expressed thus, our heavenly Father, or our Father in heaven. For it is so expressed to distinguish those who believe and fear God. But these things might appear frivolous and vain.

Did not the very train of Paul's argument require them to be so understood, and prove them to be true? For he had said just before, The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. To the Jew first, and also to the Greek. Romans 1.16 These words are surely neither obscure or ambiguous.

To the Jew first, and also to the Greek. That is, the gospel of the power of God is necessary unto all men, that believing in it they might be saved from the wrath of God revealed. Does he not then, I pray you, who declares that the Jews who excelled in righteousness in the law of God and in the power of free will are without difference, destitute and in need of the power of God, by which they might be saved, and who makes that power necessary unto them, consider that they are all under wrath? What men then will you pretend to say are not under the wrath of God, when you are thus compelled to believe that the most excellent men in the world, the Jews and Greeks, were so? And further, whom among the Jews and Greeks themselves will you accept, when Paul subjects all of them, included in the same word, without difference, to the same sentence? And are we to suppose that there were no men out of these two most exalted nations who aspired to what was meritoriously good? Were there none among them who thus aspired with all the powers of their free will? Yet Paul makes no distinction on this account.

He includes them all under wrath, and declares them all to be ungodly and unrighteous. And are we not to believe that all the other apostles, each one according to the work he had to do, included all other nations under this wrath, in the same way of declaration? Section 136 This passage of Paul, therefore, stands firmly and forcibly, urging that free will, even in its most exalted state, in the most exalted men, who were endowed with the law, righteousness, wisdom, and all the virtues, was ungodly and unrighteous and merited the wrath of God? Or the argument of Paul amounts to nothing? And if it stand good, his division leaves no medium. For he makes those who believe the gospel to be under the salvation, and all the rest to be under the wrath of God.

He makes the believing to be righteous, and the unbelieving to be ungodly, unrighteous, and under wrath. For the whole that he means to say is this, the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel, that it might be by faith. But God would be wanting in wisdom, if he should reveal righteousness unto men, when they either knew it already, or had some seeds of it in themselves.

Since, however, he is not wanting in wisdom, and yet reveals unto men the righteousness of salvation, it is manifest that free will, even in the most exalted of men, not only has wrought and can work no righteousness, but does not even know what is righteousness before God. Unless you mean to say that the righteousness of God is not revealed unto these most exalted of men, but to the most vile. But the boasting of Paul is quite the contrary, that he is a debtor both to the Jews and to the Greeks, to the wise and to the unwise, to the Greeks and to the barbarians.

Wherefore, Paul, comprehending in this passage all men together in one mass, concludes that they are all ungodly, unrighteous, and ignorant of the righteousness of faith. So far is it from

possibility that they can will or do anything good. And this conclusion is moreover confirmed from this, that God reveals the righteousness of faith to them as being ignorant and sitting in darkness.

Therefore, of themselves they know it not. And if they be ignorant of the righteousness of salvation, they are certainly under wrath and damnation. Nor can they extricate themselves therefrom, nor endeavour to extricate themselves.

For how can you endeavour, if you know neither what you are to endeavour after, nor in what way, nor to what extent you are to endeavour? With this conclusion, both the thing itself and experience agree. For show me one of the whole race of mankind, be he the most holy and most just of all men, unto whose mind it ever came that the way unto righteousness and salvation was to believe in him who is both God and man, who died for the sins of men and rose again, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, that he might still the wrath of God the Father, which Paul here says is revealed from heaven. Look at the most eminent philosophers.

What ideas had they of God? What have they left behind them in their writings concerning the wrath to come? Look at the Jews instructed by so many wonders and so many successive prophets. What did they think of this way of righteousness? They not only did not receive it, but so hated it that no nation under heaven has more atrociously persecuted Christ unto this day. And who would dare to say that in so great a people there was not one who cultivated free will and endeavored with all its powers? How comes it to pass, then, that they all endeavor in the directly opposite and that that which was the most excellent and the most excellent of men not only did not follow this way of righteousness, not only did not know it, but even thrust it from them with the greatest hatred and wished to away with it when it was published and revealed? So much so that Paul saith this way was to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness.

1 Corinthians 1.23 Since therefore Paul speaks of the Jews and Gentiles without difference, and since it is certain that the Jews and Gentiles comprehend the principal nations under heaven, it is hence certain that free will is nothing else than the greatest enemy to righteousness and the salvation of man. For it is impossible but that there must have been some among the Jews and Gentile Greeks who wrought and endeavored with all the powers of free will and yet by all that endeavoring did nothing but carry on a war against grace. Do you therefore now come forward and say what free will can endeavor towards good when goodness and righteousness themselves are a stumbling block unto it and foolishness? Nor can you say that this applies to some and not all.

Paul speaks of all without difference where he says to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness. Nor does he accept any but believers. To us, saith he, who are called and saints it is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1.24 He does not say to some Gentiles, to some Jews but plainly to the Gentiles and to the Jews who are not of us. Thus, by a manifest division separating the believing from the unbelieving and leaving no medium whatever. And we are now speaking of Gentiles as working without grace to whom Paul saith the righteousness of God is foolishness and they abhor it.

This is that meritorious endeavor of free will towards good. Section 138 See moreover whether Paul himself does not particularize the most exalted among the Greeks where he saith that the wisest among them became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened that they became wise in their own conceits that is, by their subtle disputations. Romans 1.21 Does he

not hear, I pray you, touch that which was the most exalted and most excellent in the Greeks when he touches their imaginations? For these comprehend their most sublime and exalted thoughts and opinions which they considered as solid wisdom.

But he calls that their wisdom as well in other places foolishness as here vain imagination which by its endeavoring only became worse till at last they worshipped an idol in their own darkened hearts and proceeded to the other enormities which he afterwards enumerates. If, therefore, the most exalted and devoted endeavors and works in the most exalted of the nations be evil and ungodly what shall we think of the rest who are, as it were, the commonalty and the vilest of the nations? Nor does Paul here make any difference between those who are the most exalted for he condemns all the devotedness of their wisdom without any respect of persons. And if he condemn their very works and devoted endeavors he condemns those who exert them even though they strive with all the powers of free will.

Their most exalted endeavor, I say, is declared to be evil how much more than the persons themselves who exert it. So also, just afterwards he rejects the Jews without any difference who are Jews in the letter and not in the spirit. Thou, saith he, honorest God in the letter and in the circumcision.

Again, he is not a Jew which is one outwardly but he is a Jew which is one inwardly. Romans 1, 27-29 What can be more manifest than the division here made? The Jew outwardly is a transgressor of the law. And how many Jews must we suppose there were without the faith who were men the most wise, the most religious, the most honorable who aspired unto righteousness and truth with all the devotion of endeavor? Of these, the apostle continually bears testimony that they had a zeal of God that they followed after righteousness that they strove day and night to attain unto salvation that they lived blameless and yet they are transgressors of the law because they are not Jews in the spirit nay, they determinately resist the righteousness of faith.

What conclusion then remains to be drawn but that free will is then the worst when it is the best and that the more it endeavors the worse it becomes and the worse it is? The words are plain the division is certain nothing can be said against it. But let us hear Paul who is his own interpreter in the third chapter drawing up, as it were, a conclusion he saith What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise for we have before proved both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin Romans 3, 9 Where is now free will? All, saith he, both Jews and Greeks are under sin Are there any tropes or difficulties here? What would the invented interpretations of the whole world do against this all clear sentence? He who says all accepts none and he who describes them all as being under sin, that is, the servants of sin leaves them no degree of good whatever But where has he given this proof that they are all, both Jews and Gentiles, under sin? Nowhere but where I have already shown namely, where he saith The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men This he proves to them afterwards from experience showing them that being hated of God they were given up to so many vices in order that they might be convinced from the fruits of their ungodliness that they willed and did nothing but evil And then he judges the Jews also separately where he saith that the Jew in the letter is a transgressor of the law which he proves in like manner from the fruits and from experience saying Thou who declarest that a man should not steal stealest thyself and thou who abhorrest idols commitest sacrilege thus accepting none whatever but those who are Jews in the spirit Section 140 But let us

see how Paul proves his sentiments out of the Holy Scriptures and whether the passages which he adduces are made to have more force in Paul than they have in their own places As it is written, saith he There is none righteous, no, not one There is none that understandeth There is none that seeketh after God They are all gone out of the way They are all together become unprofitable There is none that doeth good, no, not one and so forth Romans 3, 10-23 Here, let him that can produce his convenient interpretation invent tropes and pretend that the words are ambiguous and obscure Let him that dares defend free will against these damnable doctrines Then I will at once give up all and recant and will myself become a confessor and asserter of free will It is certain that these words apply to all men for the prophet introduces God as looking down from heaven upon men and pronouncing this sentence upon them So also, Psalm 14, 2-3 God looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand and seek after God But they are all gone out of the way and so forth And that the Jews might not imagine that this did not apply to them by anticipation and asserts that it applied to them most particularly, saying We know that what thing soever the law saith it saith to them that are under the law Romans 3, 19 And his intention is the same where he saith to the Jew first and also to the Greek You hence hear that all the sons of men all that are under the law that is, the Gentiles as well as the Jews are accounted before God ungodly not understanding not seeking after God no, not even one of them being all gone out of the way and become unprofitable And surely among all the children of men and those who are under the law those must also be numbered who are the best and most laudable who aspire after that which is meritorious and good with all the powers of free will And those also of whom the diatribe boasts as having the sense and certain seeds of good implanted in them unless it means to contend that they are the children of angels How then can they endeavor toward good who are all without exception ignorant of God and neither regard nor seek after God How can they have a power able to attain unto good who all without exception decline from good and become utterly unprofitable Are not the words most clear and do they not declare this that all men are ignorant of God and despise God and then turn unto evil and become unprofitable unto good For Paul is not here speaking of the ignorance of seeking food or the contempt of money but of the ignorance and contempt of religion and of godliness And that ignorance and contempt most undoubtedly are not in the flesh that is, as you interpret it the inferior and grosser affections but in the most exalted and most noble powers of men in which righteousness, godliness the knowledge and reverence of God ought to reign that is, in the reason and in the will and thus in the very power of free will in the very seed of good in that which is the most excellent in man Where are you now friend Erasmus you who promised that you would freely acknowledge that the most excellent faculty in man is flesh that is, ungodly if it should be proved from the scriptures Acknowledge now then when you hear that the most excellent faculty in man is not only ungodly but ignorant of God existing in the contempt of God turned to evil and unable to turn towards good For what is it to be unrighteous but for the will which is one of the most noble faculties in man to be unrighteous What is it to understand nothing either of God or good but for the reason which is another of the most noble faculties in man, to be ignorant of God and good, that is to be blind to the knowledge of godliness What is it to be gone out of the way and to have become unprofitable but for men to have no power in one single faculty and the least power in their most noble faculties to turn unto good but only to turn unto evil What is it not to fear God but for men to be in all their faculties and most of all in their noblest faculties contenders of all the things of God of his words, his works his laws, his precepts and his will What then can reason

propose that is right who is thus blind and ignorant What can the will choose that is good which is thus evil and impotent Nay, what can the will pursue where the reason can propose nothing but the darkness of its own blindness and ignorance and where the reason is thus erroneous and the will averse, what can the man either do or attempt that is good Section 151 But perhaps someone may here sophistically observe though the will be gone out of the way and the reason be ignorant as to the perfection of the act, yet the will can make some attempt and the reason can attain to some knowledge by its own powers seeing that we can attempt many things which we cannot perfect and we are here speaking of the existence of a power not of the perfection of the act I answer The words of the prophet comprehend both the act and the power for his saying man seeks not God is the same as if he had said man cannot seek God, which you may collect from this If there were a power or ability in man to will good it could not be but that as the motion of the divine omnipotence could not suffer it to remain actionless or to keep holiday as I before observed, it must be moved forth into act in some man at least in some one man or another and must be made manifest so as to afford an example but this is not the case, for God looks down from heaven and does not see even one who seeks after him or attempts it, wherefore it follows that that power is nowhere to be found which attempts or wills to attempt to seek after him and that all men are gone out of the way moreover if Paul be not understood to speak at the same time of impotency his disputation will amount to nothing for Paul's whole design is to make grace necessary unto all men whereas if they could make some sort of beginning themselves grace would not be necessary but now, since they cannot make that beginning, grace is necessary hence you see that free will is by this passage utterly abolished and nothing meritorious or good whatever left in man seeing that he is declared to be unrighteous ignorant of God, a contemner of God, averse to God and unprofitable in the sight of God and the words of the prophet are sufficiently forcible both in their own place and in Paul who adduces them, nor is it an inconsiderable assertion when men are said to be ignorant of and to despise God for these are the fountain springs of all iniquities, the sink of all sins, and the hell of all evils what evil is there not where there are ignorance and contempt of God in a word, the whole kingdom of Satan in men could not be defined in fewer or more expressive words than by saying they are ignorant of and despise God for there is unbelief, there is disobedience, there is sacrilege there is blasphemy against God, there is cruelty and a want of mercy towards our neighbour there is the love of self in all the things of God and man here you have a description of the glory and power of free will section 142 Paul however proceeds and testifies that he now expressly speaks with reference to all men, and to those more especially who are the greatest and most exalted saying that every mouth may be stopped and all the world become guilty before God for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight Romans 3 19-20 how I pray you shall every mouth be stopped if there be still a power remaining by which we can do something for one might then say to God, that which is here in the world is not altogether nothing, there is that here which you cannot damn even that to which you yourself gave the power of doing something the mouth of this at least will not be stopped, for it cannot be obnoxious to you for if there be any sound power in free will and it be able to do something to say that the whole world is obnoxious to or guilty before God is false for that power whose mouth is not to be stopped cannot be an inconsiderable thing, or a something in one small part of the world only, but a thing most conspicuous and most general throughout the whole world or, if its mouth be to be stopped, then it must be obnoxious to and guilty before God together with the whole world but how can it rightly be called guilty if it be not unrighteous and ungodly, that

is meriting punishment and vengeance let your friends I pray you, find out by what convenient interpretation that power of man is to be cleared from this charge of guilt by which the whole world is declared guilty before God, or by what contrivance it is to be accepted from being comprehended in the expression, all the world these words, they are all gone out of the way there is none righteous no, not one are mighty thunderclaps and riving thunderbolts they are in reality that hammer breaking the rock in pieces mentioned by Jeremiah, by which is broken in pieces everything that is not in one man only nor in some men, nor in a part of men, but in the whole world no one man being accepted so that the whole world ought at those words to tremble to fear, and to flee away for what words more awful or fearful could be uttered than these the whole world is guilty all the sons of men are turned out of the way, and become unprofitable there is no one that fears God, there is no one that is not unrighteous, there is no one that understandeth, there is no one that seeketh after God nevertheless such ever has been and still is the hardness and insensible obstinacy of our hearts, that we never should of ourselves hear or feel the force of these thunderclaps or thunderbolts, but should even while they were sounding in our ears, exalt and establish free will with all its powers in defiance of them, and thus in reality fulfill that of Malachi 1 4, they build, but I will throw down with the same power of words also is this said by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight by the deeds of the law is a forcible expression as is also this the whole world, and this all the children of men for it is to be observed that Paul abstains from the mention of persons, and mentions their ways only, that is that he might comprehend all persons and whatever in them is most excellent, whereas if he had said the commonalty of the Jews or the Pharisees or certain of the ungodly are not justified, he might have seemed to leave some accepted who from the power of free will in them, and by a certain aid from the law were not altogether unprofitable, but now when he condemns the works of the law themselves, and makes them unrighteous in the sight of God it becomes manifest that he condemns all who were mighty in a devoted observance of the law and of works and none devotedly observed the law and the works but the best and most excellent among them, nor did they thus observe them but with their best and most exalted faculties, that is their reason and their will if therefore those who exercise themselves in the observance of the law and of works, with all the devoted strivings and endeavorings, both of reason and of will, that is with all the power of free will and who were assisted by the law as a divine aid, and were instructed out of it, and roused to exertion by it if I say these are condemned of impiety because they are not justified, and are declared to be flesh in the sight of God what then will there be left in the whole race of mankind which is not flesh, and which is not ungodly? For all are condemned alike who are of the works of the law, and whether they exercise themselves in the law with the utmost devotion or moderate devotion, or with no devotion at all, it matters nothing. None of them could do anything but work the works of the law, and the works of the law do not justify.

And if they do not justify, they prove their workmen to be ungodly, and leave them so. And if they be ungodly, they are guilty, and merit the wrath of God. These things are so clear, that no one can open his mouth against them.

Section 143 But many elude and evade Paul by saying that he here calls the ceremonial works works of the law, which works after the death of Christ were dead. I answer, this is that notable error and ignorance of Jerome, which, although Augustine strenuously resisted it, yet by the withdrawing of God and the prevailing of Satan has found its way throughout the world, and has

continued down to this day, by means of which it has come to pass that it has been impossible to understand Paul, and the knowledge of Christ has consequently been obscured. Therefore, if there had been no other error in the church, this one might have been sufficiently pestilent and powerful to destroy the gospel.

For which Jerome, if peculiar grace did not interpose, has deserved hell rather than heaven. So far am I from daring to canonize him, or call him a saint. But however, it is not truth that Paul is here speaking of the ceremonial works only.

For if that be the case, how will his argument stand good, whereby he concludes that all are unrighteous and need grace? But perhaps you will say, be it so that we are not justified by the ceremonial works, yet one might be justified by the moral works of the Decalogue. By this syllogism of yours, then, you have proved that to such grace is not necessary. If this be the case, how very useful must that grace be, which delivers us from the ceremonial works only, the easiest of all works which may be extorted from us through mere fear or self-love.

And this, moreover, is erroneous, that ceremonial works are dead and unlawful since the death of Christ. Paul never said any such thing. He says that they do not justify, and that they profit the man nothing in the sight of God, so as to make him free from unrighteousness.

Holding this truth, anyone may do them, and yet do nothing that is unlawful. Thus, to eat and to drink are works which do not justify or recommend us to God, and yet he who eats and drinks does not therefore do that which is unlawful. These men err also in this.

The ceremonial works were as much commanded and exacted in the old law and in the Decalogue as the moral works, and therefore the latter had neither more nor less force than the former. For Paul is here speaking principally to the Jews, as he saith Romans 1, wherefore let no one doubt that by the works of the law here all the works of the whole law are to be understood. For if the law be abrogated and dead, they cannot be called the works of the law, for an abrogated or dead law is no longer a law, and that Paul knew full well.

Therefore he does not speak of the law abrogated when he speaks of the works of the law, but of the law in force and authority. Otherwise, how easy would it have been for him to say, the law is now abrogated, and then he would have spoken openly and clearly. But let us bring forward Paul himself, who is the best interpreter of himself.

He saith, Galatians 3.10, As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them. You see that Paul here, where he is urging the same point as he is in his epistle to the Romans, and in the same words, speaks wherever he makes mention of the works of the law, of all the laws that are written in the book of the law. And what is still more worthy of remark? Paul himself cites Moses, who curses those that continue not in the law, whereas he himself curses those who are of the works of the law, thus adducing a testimony of a different scope from that of his own sentiment, the former being in the negative, the latter in the affirmative.

But this he does because the real state of the case is such in the sight of God that those who are the most devoted to the works of the law are the farthest from fulfilling the law, as being without the Spirit who only is the fulfiller of the law, which such may attempt to fulfill by their own powers, but

they will affect nothing after all. Wherefore both declarations are true, that of Moses, that they are accursed who continue not in the works of the law, and that of Paul, that they are accursed who are of the works of the law. For both characters of persons require the Spirit, without which the works of the law, how many an excellence soever they may be, justify not, as Paul saith.

Wherefore neither character of persons continue in all things that are written, as Moses saith. Section 144 In a word Paul by this division of his fully confirms that which I maintain. For he divides law-working men into two classes, those who work after the Spirit, and those who work after the flesh, leaving no medium whatever.

He speaks thus, By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified. Romans 3.20 What is this but saying, that those whose works profit them not, work the works of the law without the Spirit, as being themselves flesh, that is, unrighteousness and ignorant of God. So Galatians 3.2, making the same division, he saith, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Again, Romans 3.21 But now the righteousness of God is manifest without the law.

And again, Romans 3.28, we conclude therefore, that a man is justified by faith without the works of the law. From all which it is manifest and clear, that in Paul the Spirit is set in opposition to the works of the law, as well as to all other things which are not spiritual, including all the powers of and everything pertaining to the flesh. So that the meaning of Paul is evidently the same as that of Christ.

John 3.6 That everything which is not of the Spirit is flesh, be it ever so precious, holy, and great. Nay, be they works of the divine law the most excellent, and wrought by all the powers imaginable. For the Spirit of Christ is wanting, without which all things are nothing short of being damnable.

Let it then be a settled point, that Paul by the works of the law means not the ceremonial works, but the works of the whole law. Then this will be a settled point also, that in the works of the law everything is condemned that is without the Spirit. And without the Spirit is that power of free will.

For that is the point in dispute, that most exalted faculty in man. For to be of the works of the law is the most exalted state in which man can be. The apostle therefore does not say who are of sins, and of ungodliness against the law, but who are of the works of the law, that is, who are the best of men, and the most devoted to the law, and who are in addition to the power of free will, even assisted, that is, instructed and roused into action by the law itself.

If therefore free will, assisted by the law, and exercising all its powers in the law, profit nothing and justify not, but be left in sin and in the flesh, what must we suppose it able to do when left to itself without the law? By the law, saith Paul, is the knowledge of sin, Romans 3.20. Here he shows how much and how far the law profits, that free will is of itself so blind that it does not even know what is sin, but has need of the law for its teacher. And what can that man do towards taking away sin who does not even know what is sin? All that he can do is to mistake that which is sin for that which is no sin, and that which is no sin for that which is sin. And this experience sufficiently proves.

How does the world, by the medium of those whom it accounts the most excellent and the most devoted to righteousness and piety, hate and persecute the righteousness of God preached in the gospel, and brand it with the name of heresy, error, and every appropriate appellation, while it

boasts of and sets forth its own works and devices, which are really sin and error, as righteousness and wisdom? By this Scripture, therefore, Paul stops the mouth of free will, where he teaches that by the law its sin is discovered unto it, of which sin it was before ignorant. So far is he from conceding to it any power or whatever to attempt that which is good. Section 145 And here is solved that question of the diatribe so often repeated throughout its book.

If we can do nothing, to what purpose are so many laws, so many precepts, so many threatenings, and so many promises? Paul here gives an answer. By the law is the knowledge of sin. His answer is far different from that which would enter the thoughts of man or of free will.

He does not say by the law is proved free will because it cooperates with it unto righteousness. For righteousness is not by the law, but by the law is the knowledge of sin, seeing that the effect, the work, in the office of the law is to be a light to the ignorant and the blind, such a light as discovers to them disease, sin, evil, death, hell, and the wrath of God, though it does not deliver from these, but shows them only. And when a man is thus brought to a knowledge of the disease of sin, he is cast down, is afflicted, nay, despairs.

The law does not help him, much less can he help himself. Another light is necessary, which might discover to him the remedy. This is the voice of the gospel, revealing Christ as the deliverer from all these evils.

Neither free will nor reason can discover him. And how should it discover him, when it is itself dark and devoid, even in the light of the law? Which might discover to it its disease? Which disease in its own light it seeth not, but believes it to be sound health? So also in Galatians 3, treating on the same point, he saith, Wherefore then serveth the law? To which he answers, not as the diatribe does, in a way that proves the existence of free will, but he saith, It was added because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise was made. Galatians 3.19 He saith, Because of transgressions, not, however, to restrain them as Jerome dreams, for Paul shows that to take away and to restrain sins by the gift of righteousness was that which was promised to the seed to come, but to cause transgressions to abound, as he saith, Romans 5.20 The law entered that sin might abound.

Not that sins were not committed and did not abound without the law, but they were not known to be transgressions and sins of such magnitude. For the most and greatest of them were considered to be righteousnesses. And while sins are thus unknown, there is no place for remedy or for hope, because they will not submit to the hand of the healer, considering themselves to be whole, and not to want a physician.

Therefore the law is necessary, which might give the knowledge of sin, in order that he who is proud and whole in his own eyes, being humbled down into the knowledge of the iniquity and greatness of his sin, might groan and breathe after the grace that is laid up in Christ. Only observe, therefore, the simplicity of the words. By the law is the knowledge of sin.

And yet these alone are of force sufficient to confound and overthrow free will altogether. For if it be true that of itself it knows not what is sin and what is evil, as the Apostle saith here, and Romans 7, 7 through 8, I should not have known that concupiscence was sin, except the law had said thou shalt not covet. How can it ever know what is righteousness and good? And if it know not what righteousness is, how can it endeavor to attain unto it? We know not the sin in which we were

born, in which we live, in which we move and exist, and which lives, moves, and reigns in us.

How then should we know that righteousness which is without us, and which reigns in heaven?

These works bring that miserable thing free will to nothing, nothing at all. End of section 145

## 12 - Sections 146-155: Discussion, Part III-b

---

Sections 146 through 155 of the Bondage of the Will by Martin Luther. Translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain.

Discussion, third part, continued. Section 146. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation for sin through faith in his blood, and so forth.

Romans 3, 22 through 26. Here, Paul speaks forth very thunderbolts against free will. First, he saith, the righteousness of God without the law is manifested.

Here, he marks the distinction between the righteousness of God and the righteousness of the law, because the righteousness of faith comes by grace without the law. His saying, without the law, can mean nothing else but that Christian righteousness exists without the works of the law, inasmuch as the works of the law avail nothing and can do nothing towards the attainment unto it. As he afterwards saith, therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Romans 3, 28. The same also he had said before, by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight. Romans 3, 20.

From all which it is most clearly manifest, that the endeavour and desire of free will are a nothing at all. For if the righteousness of God exist without the law, and without the works of the law, how shall it not, much rather, exist without free will? Especially since the most devoted effort of free will is to exercise itself in moral righteousness, or the works of that law from which its blindness and impotency derive their assistance. This word without, therefore, abolishes all moral works, abolishes all moral righteousness, abolishes all preparations unto grace.

In a word, scrape together everything you can as that which pertains to the ability of free will, and Paul will stand invincibly saying, the righteousness of God is without it. But to grant that free will can, by its endeavour, move itself in some direction, we will say, unto good works, or unto the righteousness of the civil or moral law. Yet it is not moved toward the righteousness of God, nor does God in any respect allow its devoted efforts to be worthy unto the attainment of this righteousness.

For he saith that his righteousness availeth without the works of the law. If, therefore, it cannot move itself unto the attainment of the righteousness of God, what will it be profited if it move itself by its own works and endeavours unto the attainment of, if it were possible, the righteousness of angels? Here, I presume, the words are not obscure or ambiguous, nor is any place left for tropes of any kind. Here, Paul distinguishes most manifestly the two righteousnesses, assigning the one to the law, the other to grace, and declares that the latter is given without the former, and without its works, and that the former justifies not nor avails anything without the latter.

I should like to see, therefore, how free will can stand or be defended against these scriptures. Section 147. Another thunderbolt is this.

The apostle saith that the righteousness of God is manifested and avails unto all and upon all them that believe in Christ, and that there is no difference. Romans 3, 21-22. Here again he divides in the clearest words the whole race of men into two distinct divisions.

To the believing he gives the righteousness of God, but takes it from the unbelieving. Now, no one, I suppose, will be madman enough to doubt whether or not the power or endeavour of free will be a something that is not faith in Christ Jesus. Paul then denies that anything which is not this faith is righteousness before God, and if it be not righteousness before God, it must be sin.

For there is with God no medium between righteousness and sin, which can be, as it were, a neuter, neither righteousness nor sin. Otherwise the whole argument of Paul would amount to nothing, for it proceeds wholly upon this distinct division, that whatever is done and carried on by men must be in the sight of God either righteousness or sin, righteousness if done in faith, sin if faith be wanting. With men, indeed, things pass thus.

All cases in which men in their intercourse with each other neither owe anything as a due nor do anything as a free benefit are called medium and neuter. But here the ungodly man sins against God, whether he eat or whether he drink, or whatever he do, because he abuses the creature of God by his ungodliness and perpetual ingratitude, and does not at any one moment give glory to God from his heart. Section 148.

This also is no powerless thunderbolt, where the apostle says, All have sinned and are without the glory of God, for there is no difference. Romans 3.23. What, I pray you, could be spoken more clearly. Produce one of your freewill workmen and say to me, does this man sin in his endeavor? If he does not sin, why does not Paul accept him? Why does he include him also without difference? Surely he that saith all accepts no one in any place at any time in any work or endeavor.

If therefore you accept any man for any kind of devoted desire or work, you make Paul a liar, because he includes that freewill workman or striver among all the rest and in all that he saith concerning them. Whereas Paul should have had some respect for this person and not have numbered him among the general herd of sinners. There is also that part where he saith that they are without the glory of God.

You may understand the glory of God here two ways, actively and passively. For Paul writes thus from his frequent use of Hebraisms. The glory of God, understood actively, is the glory by which God glories in us.

Understood passively, it is that glory by which we glory in God. But it seems to me proper to understand it now passively. So the faith of Christ is, according to the Latin, the faith which Christ has.

But according to the Hebrew, the faith of Christ is the faith which we have in Christ. So also the righteousness of God signifies, according to the Latin, the righteousness which God has. But according to the Hebrews, it signifies the righteousness which we have from God and before God.

Thus also the glory of God we understand according to the Latin, not according to the Hebrew, and receive it as signifying the glory which we have from God and before God, which may be called our glory in God. And that man glories in God who knows to a certainty that God has a favor unto him and deigns to look upon him with kind regard, and that whatever he does pleases God, and what does not please him is borne with by him and pardoned. If, therefore, the endeavor or desire of free will be not sin but good before God, it can certainly glory.

And in that glorying say with confidence, This pleases God, God favors this, God looks upon and accepts this, or at least bears with it and pardons it. For this is the glorying of the faithful in God, and they that have not this are rather confounded before God. But Paul here denies that these men have this, saying that they are all entirely without this glory.

This also experience itself proves. Put the question to all the exercises of free will to a man, and see if you can show me one who can honestly and from his heart say of any one of his devoted efforts and endeavors, This pleases God. If you can bring forward a single one, I am ready to acknowledge myself overthrown, and to cede to you the palm.

But I know there is not one to be found. And if this glory be wanting, so that the conscience dares not say to a certainty and with confidence, This pleases God, it is certain that it does not please God. For as a man believes, so it is unto him.

Because he does not to a certainty believe that he pleases God, which nevertheless it is necessary to believe. For to doubt of the favor of God is the very sin itself of unbelief, because he will have it believed with the most assuring faith that he is favorable. Therefore I have convinced them upon the testimony of their own conscience that free will, being without the glory of God, is with all its powers, its devoted strivings and endeavors, perpetually under the guilt of the sin of unbelief.

And what will the advocates of free will say to that which follows, being justified freely by his grace? Romans 3.24 What is the meaning of the word freely? What is the meaning of by his grace? How will merit and endeavor accord with freely given righteousness? But perhaps they will say here that they attribute to free will a very little indeed, and that which is by no means the merit of worthiness, meritum condignum. These, however, are mere empty words, for all that is sought for in the defense of free will is to make place for merit. This is manifest, for the diatribe has throughout argued and expostulated thus.

If there be no freedom of will, how can there be place for merit? And if there be no place for merit, how can there be place for reward? To whom will a reward be assigned if justification be without merit? Paul here gives you an answer, that there is no such thing as merit at all, but that all who are justified are justified freely. That is, that this is ascribed to no one but to the grace of God. And when this righteousness is given, the kingdom and life eternal are given with it.

Where is your endeavoring now? Where is your devoted effort? Where are your works? Where are your merits of free will? Where is the profit of them all put together? You cannot here make, as a pretense, obscurity and ambiguity. The facts and the works are most clear and most plain. But be it so that they attribute to free will a very little indeed, yet they teach us that by that very little we can attain unto righteousness and grace.

Nor do they solve that question, Why does God justify one and leave another, in any other way than by asserting the freedom of the will, and saying, Because the one endeavors and the other does not? And God rewards the one for his endeavoring, and despises the other for his not endeavoring, lest if he did otherwise he should appear to be unjust. And notwithstanding all their pretense, both by their tongue and pen, that they do not profess to attain unto grace by the merit of worthiness, *meritum condignum*, nor call it the merit of worthiness, yet they only mock us with a term, and hold fast their tenet all the while. For what is the amount of their pretense that they do not call it the merit of worthiness, if nevertheless they assign unto it all that belongs to the merit of worthiness, saying that he in the sight of God attains unto grace who endeavors, and he who does not endeavor does not attain unto it? Is this not plainly making it to be the merit of worthiness? Is it not making God a respecter of works, of merits, and of persons, to say that one is devoid of grace from his own fault because he did not endeavor after it, but that another, because he did endeavor after it, has attained unto grace, unto which he would not have attained if he had not endeavored after it? If this be not the merit of worthiness, then I should like to be informed what it is that is called the merit of worthiness.

In this way you may play a game of mockery upon all words, and say it is not indeed the merit of worthiness, but is in effect the same as the merit of worthiness. The thorn is not a bad tree, but is in effect the same as a bad tree. The fig is not a good tree, but is in effect the same as a good tree.

The diatribe is not indeed impious, but says and does nothing but what is impious. Section 149. It has happened to these asserters of free will, according to the old proverb, Striving dire scyllas' rock to shun, they gainst Charybdis' headlong run.

For devotedly striving to dissent from the Pelagians, they begin to deny the merit of worthiness, whereas by the very way in which they deny it, they establish it more firmly than ever. They deny it by their word and pen, but establish it in reality, and in heart sentiment. And thus they are worse than the Pelagians themselves, and that on two accounts.

First, the Pelagians plainly, candidly, and ingenuously asserted the merit of worthiness, thus calling a boat a boat, and a fig a fig, and teaching what they really think, whereas our free will friends, while they think and teach the same thing, yet mock us with lying words and false appearances, as though they dissented from the Pelagians, when the fact is quite the contrary. So that with respect to their hypocrisy, they seem to be the Pelagians strongest opposers, but with respect to the reality of the matter, and their heart tenet, they are twice-dipped Pelagians. And next, under this hypocrisy, they estimate and purchase the grace of God at a much lower rate than the Pelagians themselves.

For these assert that it is not a certain little something in us by which we attain unto grace, but whole, full, perfect, great, and many devoted efforts and works, whereas our friends declare that it is a certain little something, almost a nothing, by which we deserve grace. If therefore there must be error, they err with more honesty and less pride, who say that the grace of God is purchased at a great price, and who account it dear and precious, than those who teach that it may be purchased at that which is very little and inconsiderable, and account it cheap and contemptible. But, however, Paul pounds both in pieces in one mortar, by one word, where he saith that all are justified freely, and again that they are justified without the law, and without the works of the law.

And he who asserts that the justification must be free in all who are justified, leaves none accepted who work, deserve, or prepare themselves. He leaves no work which can be called merit of congruity or merit of worthiness. And by the one hurling of this thunderbolt he dashes in pieces both the Pelagians with their whole merit, and the Sophists with their very little merit.

For a free justification allows of no workmen, because a free gift and a work preparation are manifestly in opposition to each other. Moreover, the being justified through grace will not allow of respect unto the worthiness of any person, as the Apostle saith also afterwards, Chapter 11, If by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. Romans 11.6. He saith the same also.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. Romans 4.4. Wherefore, my Paul stands an invincible destroyer of free will, and lays prostrate two armies by one word. For if we be justified without works, all works are condemned, whether they be very little or very great.

He accepts none, but thunders alike against all. Section 150. Here you may see the yawning inconsiderateness of all our friends, and what it profits a man to rely upon the ancient fathers, who have been approved through the series of so many ages.

Were they not also all alike, blind to? Nay, rather, did they not disregard the most clear and most manifest words of Paul? Pray, what is there that can be spoken clearly and plainly in defence of grace against free will, if the argument of Paul be not clear and plain? He proceeds with a glow of argument, and exalts grace against works, and that in words the most clear and most plain, saying that we are justified freely, and that grace is no more grace if it be sought by works. Thus most manifestly excluding all works in the matter of justification, to the intent that he might establish grace only, and free justification. And yet we in all this light still seek after darkness, and when we cannot ascribe unto ourselves great things and all things, we endeavour to ascribe unto ourselves a something in degree, a very little, merely that we might maintain our tenet that justification through the grace of God is not free and without works.

As though he who declares that greater things and all things profit us nothing unto justification, does not much more deny that things in degree, and things very little, profit us nothing also. Particularly when he has settled the point that we are justified by grace alone, without any works whatever, and therefore without the law itself in which are comprehended all works, great and little, works of congruity and works of worthiness. Go now then and boast of the authorities of the ancients, and depend on what they say, all of whom you see to a man disregarded Paul, that most plain and most clear teacher.

And as it were purposely shunned this morning star, yea this sun rather, because being wrapped up in their own carnal reason, they thought it absurd that no place should be left to merit. Section 151. Let us now bring forward that example of Abraham, which Paul afterwards adduces.

If, saith he, Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness. Romans 4 2-3.

Mark here again, I pray you, the distinction of Paul, where he is showing the twofold righteousness of Abraham. The one is of works, that is moral and civil. But he denies that he was justified by this

before God, even though he were justified by it before men.

Moreover, by that righteousness he hath whereof to glory before men, but is all the while himself without the glory of God. Nor can any one here say that they are the works of the law or of ceremonies, which are here condemned, seeing that Abraham existed so many years before the law. Paul plainly speaks of the works of Abraham, and those his best works.

For it would be ridiculous to dispute whether or not any one were justified by evil works. If therefore Abraham be righteous by no works whatever, and if both he himself and all his works be left under sin, unless he be clothed with another righteousness, even with the righteousness of faith, it is quite manifest that no man can do anything by works toward his becoming righteous. And moreover, that no works, no devoted efforts, no endeavors of free will avail anything in the sight of God, but are all judged to be ungodly, unrighteous, and evil.

For if the man himself be not righteous, neither will his works or endeavors be righteous. And if they be not righteous, they are damnable, and merit wrath. The other righteousness is that of faith, which consists not in any works, but in the favor and imputation of God through grace.

And mark how Paul dwells upon the word imputed, how he urges it, repeats it, and inculcates it. Now saith he, To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth in him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Romans 4, 4-5. According to the purpose of the gift of God. Then he adduces David, saying the same thing concerning the imputation through grace.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin, and so forth. Romans 4, 6-8. In this chapter he repeats the word impute above ten times.

In a word he distinctly sets forth, him that worketh, and him that worketh not, leaving no medium between them. He declares that righteousness is not imputed to him that worketh, but asserts that righteousness is imputed to him that worketh not, if he believe. Here is no way by which free will, with its devoted efforts and endeavors, can escape or get off.

It must be numbered with him that worketh, or with him that not. If it be numbered with him that worketh, you hear that righteousness is not imputed unto it. If it be numbered with him that worketh not, but believeth in God, righteousness is imputed unto it.

And then it will not be the power of free will, but the new creature by faith. But if righteousness be not imputed unto it, being him that worketh, then it becomes manifest that all its works are nothing but sin, evils, and impieties before God. Nor can any sophist here snarl and say that although man be evil, yet his work may not be evil.

For Paul speaks not of the man simply, but of him that worketh, to the very intent that he might declare in the plainest words that the works and devoted efforts themselves of man are condemned, whatever they may be, by what name soever they may be called, or under what form soever they may be done. He here also speaks of good works, because the points of his argument are justification and merits. And when he speaks of him that worketh, he speaks of all workers and of all their works, but more especially of their good and meritorious works.

Otherwise his distinction between him that worketh and him that worketh not will amount to nothing. Section 152. I here omit to bring forward those all-powerful arguments drawn from the purpose of grace, from the promise, from the force of the law, from original sin, and from the election of God, of which there is no one that would not of itself utterly overthrow free will.

For if grace come by the purpose of God, or by election, it comes of necessity, and not by any devoted efforts or endeavor of our own, as I have already shown. Moreover, if God promised grace before the law, as Paul argues here, and in his epistle to the Galatians also, then it does not come by works or by the law. Otherwise it would be no longer a promise.

And so also faith, if works were of any avail, would come to nothing, by which nevertheless Abraham was justified before the law was given. Again, as the law is the strength of sin, and only discovers sin, but does not take it away, it brings the conscience in guilty before God. This is what Paul means when he saith, The law worketh wrath.

Romans 4.15. How then can it be possible that righteousness should be obtained by the law? And if we derive no help from the law, how can we derive any help from the power of free will alone? Moreover, since we all lie under the same sin and damnation of the one man Adam, how can we attempt anything which is not sin and damnable? For when he saith all, he accepts no one, neither the power of free will, nor any workman, whether he work or work not, attempt or attempt not, he must of necessity be included among the rest in the all. Nor should we sin or be damned by that one sin of Adam if the sin were not our own, for who could be damned for the sin of another, especially in the sight of God? Nor is the sin ours by imitation, or by working, for this would not be the one sin of Adam, because then it would not be the sin which he committed, but which we committed ourselves. It becomes our sin by generation, but of this in some other place.

Original sin itself therefore will not allow of any other power in free will but that of sinning and going on unto damnation. These arguments, I say, I omit to bring forward, both because they are most manifest and most forcible, and because I have touched upon them already. For if I wished to produce all those parts of Paul which overthrow free will, I could not do better than go through it with a continued commentary on the whole of his epistle, as I have done on the third and fourth chapters, on which I have dwelt thus particularly that I might show all our free will friends their yawning inconsiderateness, who so read Paul in these all clear parts as to see anything in them but these most powerful arguments against free will, and that I might expose the folly of that confidence which they place in the authority and writings of the ancient teachers, and leave them to consider with what force the remaining most clear arguments must make against them if they should be handled with care and judgment.

Section 153. As to myself, I must confess, I am more than astonished that, when Paul so often uses those universally applying words, all, none, not, not one, without, thus they are all gone out of the way, there is none that doeth good, no not one, all are sinners and condemned by the one sin of Adam, we are justified by faith without the law, without the works of the law, so that if anyone wished to speak otherwise so as to be more intelligible he could not speak in words more clear and more plain. I am more than astonished I say how it is that words and sentences contrary and contradictory to these universally applying words and sentences have gained so much ground, which say some are not gone out of the way, are not unrighteous, are not evil, are not sinners, are not condemned, there is something in man which is good and which endeavors after good, as

though that man, whoever he be, who endeavors after good, were not comprehended in this one word all, or none, or not.

I could find nothing even if I wished it to advance against Paul or to reply in contradiction to him, but should be compelled to acknowledge that the power of my free will together with its endeavors is comprehended in those all's and none's of whom Paul here speaks, if that is no new kind of grammar or new manner of speech were introduced. Moreover if Paul had used this mode of expression once or in one place only there might have been room for imagining a trope or for taking hold of and twisting some detached terms, whereas he uses it perpetually both in the affirmative and in the negative, and so expresses his sentiments by his argument and by his distinctive division in every place and in all parts, that not the nature of his words only and the current of his language, but that which follows and that which precedes, the circumstances, the scope, and the very body of the whole disputation all compel us to conclude according to common sense that the meaning of Paul is that out of faith of Christ there is nothing but sin and damnation. It was thus that we promised we would refute free will so that all our adversaries should not be able to resist, which I presume I have affected, even though they shall not so far acknowledge themselves vanquished as to come over to my opinion or to be silent, for that is not in my power, that is the gift of the Spirit of God.

Section 154. But however, before we hear the evangelist John, I will just add the crowning testimony from Paul, and I am prepared, if this be not sufficient, to oppose Paul to free will by commenting upon him throughout. Where he divides the human race into two distinctive divisions, flesh and spirit, he speaks thus, they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit do mind the things of the spirit.

Romans 8.5. As Christ also does, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. John 3.6. That Paul here calls all carnal who are not spiritual is manifest both from the division itself and the opposition of spirit to flesh, and from the very words of Paul himself where he adds, but ye are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if so be that the spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Romans 8.9. What else is the meaning of, but ye are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if so be that the spirit of Christ dwell in you, but that those who have not the spirit are necessarily in the flesh. And if any man be not of Christ, what else is he but of Satan? It is manifest, therefore, that those who are devoid of the spirit are in the flesh and under Satan. Now let us see what his opinion is concerning the endeavor and the power of free will in the carnal who are in the flesh.

They cannot please God. Again, the carnal mind is death. Again, the carnal mind is enmity against God.

And again, it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Romans 8.5-8. Here, let the advocate for free will answer me. How can that endeavor towards good, which is death, which cannot please God, which is enmity against God, which is not subject to God and cannot be subject to him? Nor does Paul mean to say that the carnal mind is dead and inimical to God, but that it is death itself, enmity itself, which cannot possibly be subject to the law of God or please him, as he had said just before.

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, and so forth. Romans 8.3. But I am very well acquainted with that fable of origin concerning the threefold affection, the one of which he calls flesh, the other soul, and the other spirit, making the soul, that medium affection, vertical either way, towards the flesh or towards the spirit. But these are merely his own dreams.

He speaks them forth only, but does not prove them. Paul here calls everything flesh, that is, without the spirit, as I have already shown. Therefore, those most exalted virtues of the best men are in the flesh, that is, they are dead, and at enmity against God.

They are not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be, and they please not God. For Paul does not only say that such men are not subject, but that they cannot be subject. So also Christ saith, An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit.

Matthew 7.17. And again, How can ye being evil speak that which is good? Matthew 12.34. Here you see, we not only speak that which is evil, but cannot speak that which is good. And though he saith in another place that we who are evil know how to give good gifts unto our children, Matthew 6.11, yet he denies that we do good, even when we give good gifts, because those good gifts which we give are the creatures of God. But we ourselves, not being good, cannot give those good gifts well.

For he is speaking unto all men, nay, even unto his own disciples, so that these two sentiments of Paul, that the just man liveth by faith, Romans 1.17, and that whatsoever is not of faith is sin, Romans 14.23, stand confirmed, the latter of which follows from the former. For if there be nothing by which we are justified but faith only, it is evident that those who are not of faith are not justified. And if they be not justified, they are sinners.

And if they be sinners, they are evil trees, and can do nothing but sin, and bring forth evil fruit. Wherefore, free will is nothing but the servant of sin, of death, and of Satan, doing nothing, and being able to do or attempt nothing but evil. Section 155.

Add to this that example, Romans 10.24, taken out of Isaiah, I was found of them that sought me not, I was made manifest unto them that asked not for me. He speaks this with reference to the Gentiles, that it was given unto them to hear and know Christ, when before they could not even think of him, much less seek him or prepare themselves for him by the power of free will. From this example it is sufficiently evident that grace comes so free that no thought concerning it or attempt or desire after it precedes.

So also Paul, when he was Saul, what did he do by that exalted power of free will? Certainly, in respect of reason, he intended that which was best and most meritoriously good. But by what endeavors did he come unto grace? He did not only not seek after it, but received it, even when he was furiously maddened against it. On the other hand, he saith of the Jews, the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained unto the righteousness which is of faith.

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained unto the law of righteousness. Romans 9, 30-31. What has any advocate for free will to mutter against this? The Gentiles, when filled with ungodliness and every vice, received righteousness freely, from a mercy showing God.

While the Jews, who followed after righteousness with all their devoted effort and endeavor, are frustrated. Is this not plainly saying that the endeavor of free will is all in vain, even when it strives to do the best, and that free will of itself can only fall back and grow worse and worse? Nor can anyone say that the Jews did not follow after righteousness with all the power of free will. For Paul himself bears this testimony of them, that they had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

Romans 10, 2. Therefore, nothing which is attributed to free will was wanting to the Jews, and yet it attained unto nothing, nay, unto the contrary of that after which they strove. Whereas there is nothing in the Gentiles which is attributed to free will, and they attained unto the righteousness of God. And what is this but a most manifest example from each nation, and a most clear testimony of Paul, proving that grace is given freely to the most undeserving and unworthy, and is not attained unto by any devoted efforts, endeavors, or works, either small or great, of any men, be they the best and most meritorious, or even of those who have sought and followed after righteousness with all the ardor of zeal.

End of section 155

## 13 - Sections 156-168: Discussion, Part III-c

---

Sections 156 through 168 of *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther, translated by Henry Cole. This LibriVox recording is in the public domain. Discussion, third part, concluded.

Section 156 Now let us come to John, who is also a most copious and powerful subverter of free will. He, at the very outset, attributes to free will such blindness that it cannot even see the light of the truth. So far is it from possibility that it should endeavor after it.

He speaks thus, The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. John 1.5 And directly afterwards, He was in the world, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own knew him not.

Verses 10 through 11. What do you imagine he means by world? Will you attempt to separate any man from being included in this term, but him who is born again of the Holy Spirit? The term world is very particularly used by this apostle, by which he means the whole race of men. Whatever, therefore, he says of the world is to be understood of the whole race of men.

And hence, whatever he says of the world is to be understood also of free will, as that which is most excellent in man. According to this apostle, then, the world does not know the light of truth. The world hates Christ and His.

The world neither knows nor sees the Holy Spirit. The whole world is settled in enmity. All that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Love not the world. Ye, saith he, are not of the world. The world cannot hate you, but it hateth me, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.

All these, and many other like passages, are proclamations of what free will is, the principal part of the world, ruling the empire of Satan. For John also himself speaks of the world by antithesis, making the world to be everything in the world which is not translated into the kingdom of the Spirit. So also Christ saith to the apostles, I have chosen you out of the world, and ordained you, and so forth.

John 15, 16 If, therefore, there were any in the world who, by the powers of free will, endeavored so as to attain unto good, which would be the case if free will could do anything, John certainly ought in reverence for these persons to have softened down the term, lest, by a word of such general application, he should involve them in all the evils of which he condemns the world. But as he does not this, it is evident that he makes free will guilty of all that is laid to the charge of the world. Because whatever the world does, it does by the power of free will, that is, by its will and by its reason, which are its most exalted faculties.

He then goes on, But, as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1, 12-13 Having finished this distinctive division, he

rejects from the kingdom of Christ all that is of blood, of the will of the flesh, and of the will of man. By blood, I believe, he means the Jews, that is, those who wished to be the children of the kingdom, because they were the children of Abraham and of the fathers, and hence gloried in their blood.

By the will of the flesh, I understand the devoted efforts of the people which they exercised in the law and in works. For flesh here signifies the carnal without the spirit, who had indeed a will and endeavour, but who, because the spirit was not in them, were carnal. By the will of man, I understand the devoted efforts of all generally, that is, of the nations, or of any man whatever, whether exercised by the law or without the law.

So that the sense is, they become the sons of God neither by the birth of the flesh, nor by a devoted observance of the law, nor by any devoted human effort whatever, but by a divine birth only. If, therefore, they be neither born of the flesh, nor brought up by the law, nor prepared by any human discipline, but are born again of God, it is manifest that free will here profits nothing. For I understand man, to signify here, according to the Hebrew manner of speech, any man, or all men, even as flesh is understood to signify, by antithesis, the people without the spirit, and the will of man I understand to signify the greatest power in man, that is, that principal part, free will.

But be it so that we do not dwell thus upon the signification of the words singly, yet the sum and substance of the meaning is most clear, that John, by this distinctive division, rejects everything that is not of divine generation, since he says that men are made the sons of God none otherwise than by being born of God, which takes place, according to his own interpretation, by believing on his name. In this rejection, therefore, the will of man, or free will, as it is not of divine generation nor faith, is necessarily included. But if free will avail anything, the will of man ought not to be rejected by John, nor ought men to be drawn away from it, and sent to faith and to the new birth only, lest that of Isaiah should be pronounced against him, Woe unto you that call good evil! Whereas now, since he rejects alike all blood, the will of the flesh, and the will of man, it is evident that the will of man avails nothing more towards making men the sons of God than blood does, or the carnal birth.

And no one doubts whether or not the carnal birth makes men the sons of God, for as Paul saith, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God. Romans 9.8, which he proves by the examples of Ishmael in Esau. Section 157 The same John introduces the Baptist speaking thus of Christ, And of his fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

John 1.16 He says that grace is received by us out of the fullness of Christ. But for what merit or devoted effort? For grace, saith he, that is, of Christ. As Paul also saith, The grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

Romans 5.15 Where is now the endeavor of free will, by which grace is obtained? John and Paul here saith, That grace is not received for any devoted effort of our own, but even for the grace of another, or the merit of another, that is, of one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore it is either false that we receive our grace for the grace of another, or else it is evident that free will is nothing at all. For both cannot consist, that the grace of God is both so cheap that it may be obtained in common and everywhere by the little endeavor of any man, and at the same time so dear that it is given unto us only in and through the grace of one man, and he so great.

And I would also that the advocates for free will be admonished in this place that when they assert free will they are deniers of Christ. For if I obtain grace by my own endeavors, what need have I of the grace of Christ for the receiving of my grace? Or what do I want when I have gotten the grace of God? For the diatribe has said, And all the sophists say that we obtain grace and are prepared for the reception of it by our own endeavors, not, however, according to worthiness, but according to congruity. This is plainly denying Christ, for whose grace the Baptist here testifies that we receive grace.

For as to that fetch about worthiness and congruity, I have refuted that already and proved it to be a mere play upon empty words, while the merit of worthiness is really intended, and that to a more impious length than ever the Pelagians themselves went, as I have already shown. And hence the ungodly sophists, together with the diatribe, have more awfully denied the Lord Christ who bought us than ever the Pelagians or any heretics have denied him. So far is it from possibility that grace should allow of any particle or power of free will.

But, however, that the advocates for free will deny Christ is proved not by this scripture only, but by their own very way of life. For by their free will they have made Christ to be unto them no longer a sweet mediator, but a dreaded judge, whom they strive to please by the intercessions of the virgin mother and of the saints, and also by variously invented works, by rites, ordinances, and vows, by all which they aim at appeasing Christ in order that he might give them grace. But they do not believe that he intercedes before God and obtains grace for them by his blood and grace, as it is here said, for grace.

And as they believe, so it is unto them. For Christ is in truth an inexorable judge to them, and justly so. For they leave him who is a mediator and most merciful Savior and account his blood and grace of less value than the devoted efforts and endeavors of their free will.

Section 158 Now let us hear an example of free will. Nicodemus is a man in whom there is everything that you can desire, which free will is able to do. For what does that man omit either of devoted effort or endeavor? He confesses Christ to be true and to have come from God.

He declares his miracles. He comes by night to hear him and to converse with him. Does he not appear to have sought after by the power of free will those things which pertain unto piety and salvation? But mark what shipwreck he makes when he hears the true way of salvation by a new birth to be taught by Christ.

Does he acknowledge it or confess that he ever sought after it? Nay, he revolts from it and is confounded. So much so that he does not only say he does not understand it, but heaves against it as impossible. How, says he, can these things be true? John 3.9 And no wonder! For who ever heard that man must be born again unto salvation of water and of the Spirit? Who ever thought that the Son of God must be exalted, that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life? Did the greatest and most acute philosophers ever make mention of this? Did the princes of this world ever possess this knowledge? Did the free will of any man ever attain unto this by endeavors? Does not Paul confess it to be wisdom hidden in a mystery, foretold indeed by the prophets, but revealed by the gospel, so that it was secret and hidden from the world? In a word, ask experience, and the whole world, human reason itself, and in consequence free will itself, is compelled to confess that it never knew Christ nor heard of Him before the gospel

came into the world.

And if it did not know Him, much less could it seek after Him, search for Him, or endeavor to come unto Him. But Christ is the way of truth, life, and salvation. It must confess, therefore, whether it will or know, that of its own powers it neither knew nor could seek after those things which pertain unto the way of truth and salvation.

And yet, contrary to this, our own very confession and experience, like madmen, we dispute in empty words that there is in us that power remaining which can both know and apply itself unto those things which pertain unto salvation. This is nothing more or less than saying that Christ, the Son of God, was exalted for us when no one could ever have known it or thought of it, but that nevertheless this very ignorance is not an ignorance, but a knowledge of Christ, that is, of those things which pertain unto salvation. Do you not yet, then, see and palpably feel out that the assertors of free will are plainly mad while they call that knowledge which they themselves confess to be ignorance? Is this not to put darkness for light? Isaiah 5.20 But so it is, though God so powerfully stopped the mouth of free will by its own confession and experience, yet even then it cannot keep silence and give God the glory.

Section 159 And now, farther, as Christ is said to be the way, the truth, and the life, John 14.6, and that by positive assertion so that whatever is not Christ is not the way, but error, is not the truth, but a lie, is not the life, but death, it of necessity follows that free will, as it is neither Christ nor in Christ, must be bound in error, in a lie, and in death. Where now will be found that medium and neuter that the power of free will which is not in Christ, that is in the way, the truth, and the life, is yet not of necessity either error, or a lie, or death? For if all things which are said concerning Christ and grace were not said by positive assertion, that they might be opposed to their contraries, that is, that out of Christ there is nothing but Satan, out of grace nothing but wrath, out of the light nothing but darkness, out of the life nothing but death, what, I ask you, would be the use of all the writings of the apostles, nay of the whole Scripture? The whole would be written in vain, because they would not fix the point that Christ is necessary, which nevertheless is their special design. And for this reason, because a medium would be found out which of itself would be neither evil nor good, neither of Christ nor of Satan, neither true nor false, neither alive nor dead, and perhaps neither anything nor nothing, and that would be called that which is most excellent and most exalted in the whole race of men.

Take it therefore which way you will. If you grant that the Scriptures speak in positive assertion, you can say nothing for free will but that which is contrary to Christ. That is, you will say that error, death, Satan, and all evils reign in him.

If you do not grant that they speak in positive assertion, you weaken the Scriptures, make them to establish nothing, not even to prove that Christ is necessary. And thus, while you establish free will, you make Christ void and bring the whole Scripture to destruction. And though you may pretend verbally that you confess Christ, yet in reality and in heart you deny him.

For if the power of free will be not a thing erroneous altogether and damnable, but sees and wills those things which are good and meritorious and which pertain unto salvation, it is whole, it wants not the physician Christ, nor does Christ redeem that part of man. For what need is there for light and life when there is light and life already? Moreover, if that power be not redeemed, the best part

in man is not redeemed, but is of itself good and whole. And then also God is unjust if he damn any man, because he damns that which is the most excellent in man and whole.

That is, he damns him when innocent. For there is no man who has not free will, and although the evil man abused this, yet this power itself, according to what you teach, is not so destroyed but that it can and does endeavor towards good. And if it be such, it is without doubt good, holy, and just.

Wherefore it ought not to be damned, but to be distinctly separated from the man who is to be damned. But this cannot be done, and even if it could be done, man would then be without free will. Nay, he would not be man at all.

He would neither have merit nor demerit. He could neither be damned nor saved, but would be completely a brute, and no longer immortal. It follows, therefore, that God is unjust who damns that good, just, and holy power, which, though it be in an evil man, does not need Christ as the evil man does.

Section 160 But let us proceed with John. He that believeth on him, saith he, is not condemned. But he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3.18 Tell me, is free will included in the number of those that believe, or not? If it be, then again it has no need of grace, because of itself it believes on Christ, whom of itself it never knew nor thought of. If it be not, then it is judged already. And what is this but saying that it is damned in the sight of God? But God damns none but the ungodly.

Therefore it is ungodly. And what godliness can that which is ungodly endeavor after? For I do not think that the power of free will can be accepted, seeing that he speaks of the whole man as being condemned. Moreover, unbelief is not one of the grosser affections, but is that chief affection seated and ruling on the throne of the will and reason, just the same as its contrary, faith.

For to be unbelieving is to deny God and to make him a liar. If we believe not, we make God a liar. 1 John 5.10 How then can that power which is contrary to God and which makes him a liar endeavor after that which is good? And if that power be not unbelieving and ungodly, John ought not to say of the whole man that he is condemned already, but to speak thus, man, according to his grosser affections, is condemned already.

But according to that which is best and most excellent he is not condemned, because that endeavors after faith, or rather is already believing. Hence, where the Scripture so often saith, All men are liars, we must, upon the authority of free will, on the contrary say, the Scripture rather lies. Because man is not a liar as to his best part, that is, his reason and will, but as to his flesh only, that is, his blood and his grosser part.

So that that whole, according to which he is called man, that is, his reason and his will, is sound and holy. Again, there is that of the Baptist. He that believeth on the sun hath everlasting life.

He that believeth not the sun shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. John 3.36 We must understand upon him thus, that is, the wrath of God abideth upon the grosser affections of the man. But upon that power of free will, that is, upon his will and his reason, abide grace and

everlasting life.

Hence, according to this, in order that free will might stand, whatever is in the Scriptures said against the ungodly, you are by the figure synecdoche to twist round to apply to that brutal part of man that the truly rational and human part might remain safe. I have therefore to render thanks to the assertors of free will, because I may sin with all confidence, knowing that my reason and will, or my free will, cannot be damned, because it cannot be destroyed by my sinning, but forever remain sound, righteous, and holy. And thus, happy in my will and reason, I shall rejoice that my filthy and brutal flesh is distinctly separated from me and damned.

So far shall I be from wishing Christ to become its Redeemer. You see here to what the doctrine of free will brings us. It denies all things, divine and human, temporal and eternal, and with all these enormities makes a laughing-stock of itself.

Section 161 Again the Baptist saith, A man can receive nothing, except it were given him from above. John 3.27 Let not the diatribe here produce its forces where it enumerates all those things which we have from heaven. We are now disputing not about nature, but about grace.

We are inquiring not what we are upon earth, but what we are in heaven before God. We know that man was constituted Lord over all things which are beneath himself, over which he has a right and a free will, that those things might do and obey, as he wills and thinks. But we are now inquiring whether he has a free will over God, that he should do and obey in those things which man wills.

Or rather, whether God has not a free will over man, that he should will and do what God wills, and should be able to do nothing but what he wills and does. The Baptist here says that he can receive nothing, except it be given him from above. Wherefore free will must be a nothing at all.

Again, He that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth. He that cometh from heaven is above all. John 3.31 Here again he makes all those earthly who are not of Christ, and says that they savour and speak of earthly things only.

Nor does he leave any medium characters. But surely free will is not he that cometh from heaven. Wherefore it must of necessity be he that is of the earth, and that speaks of the earth, and savours of the earth.

But if there were any power in man which at any time, in any place, or by any work, did not savour of the earth, the Baptist ought to have accepted this person, and not to have said in a general way concerning all those who are out of Christ, that they are of the earth, and speak of the earth. So also afterwards Christ saith, Ye are of the world, I am not of the world. Ye are from beneath, I am from above.

John 8.23 And yet those to whom he spoke had free will, that is, reason and will. But still he says that they are of the world. But what news would he have told if he had merely said that they were of the world as to their grosser affections? Did not the whole world know this before? Moreover, what need was there for his saying that men were of the world as to that part in which they are brutal? For according to that, beasts are also of the world.

Section 162 And now what do those words of Christ where he saith, No one can come unto me except my Father which hath sent me draw him. John 6.44 Leave to free will. For he says it is necessary that everyone should hear and learn of the Father himself, and that all must be taught of God.

Here indeed he not only declares that the works and devoted efforts of free will are of no avail, but that even the word of the Gospel itself of which he is here speaking is heard in vain unless the Father himself speak within and teach and draw. No one can, no one can saith he, come, by which that power whereby men can endeavour something towards Christ, that is, towards those things which pertain unto salvation, is declared to be a nothing at all. Nor does that at all profit free will, which the diatribe brings forward out of Augustine by way of casting a slur upon this all-clear and all-powerful Scripture, that God draws us in the same way as we draw a sheep, by holding out to it a green bough.

By this similitude he would prove that there is in us a power to follow the drawing of God. But this similitude avails nothing in the present passage. For God holds out not one of his good things only, but many, nay, even his Son Christ himself, and yet no man follows him unless the Father hold him forth otherwise within and draw otherwise.

Nay, the whole world follows the Son whom he holds forth. But this similitude harmonizes sweetly with the experience of the godly, who are now made sheep, and know God their shepherd. These living in and being moved by the Spirit, follow wherever God wills, and whatever he holds out to them.

But the ungodly man comes not unto him, even when he hears the word, unless the Father draw and teach within, which he does by shedding abroad his Spirit. And where that is done there is a different kind of drawing from that which is without. There Christ is held forth in the illumination of the Spirit, whereby the man is drawn unto Christ with the sweetest of all drawing, under which he is passive while God speaks, teaches, and draws, rather than seeks or runs of himself.

Section 163 I will produce yet one more passage from John, where he saith, The Spirit shall reprove the world of sin, because they believe not in me. John 16, 9 You here see that it is sin not to believe in Christ. And this sin is seated not in the skin, nor in the hairs of the head, but in the very reason and will.

Moreover, as Christ makes the whole world guilty from this sin, and as it is known by experience that the world is ignorant of this sin, as much so as it is ignorant of Christ, seeing that it must be revealed by the reproof of the Spirit, it is manifest that free will, together with its will and reason, is accounted a captive of this sin, and condemned before God. Wherefore, as long as it is ignorant of Christ, and believes not in him, it can will or attempt nothing good, but necessarily serves that sin of which it is ignorant. In a word, since the Scripture declares Christ everywhere by positive assertion and by antithesis, as I said before, in order that it might subject everything that is without the Spirit of Christ to Satan, to ungodliness, to error, to darkness, to sin, to death, and to the wrath of God, all the testimonies concerning Christ must make directly against free will.

And they are innumerable, yea, the whole of the Scripture. If, therefore, our subject of discussion is to be decided by the judgment of the Scripture, the victory in every respect is mine. For there is not one jot or tittle of the Scripture remaining which does not condemn the doctrine of free will

altogether.

But if the great theologians and defenders of free will know not, or pretend not to know, that the Scripture everywhere declares Christ by positive assertion and by antithesis, yet all Christians know it, and in common confess it. They know, I say, that there are two kingdoms in the world mutually militating against each other, that Satan reigns in the one who on that account is by Christ called the prince of this world, John 12, 31, and by Paul, the god of this world, 2 Corinthians 4, 4, who according to the testimony of the same Paul, holds all captive according to his will, who are not rescued from him by the spirit of Christ, nor does he suffer any to be rescued by any other power but that of the spirit of God, as Christ testifies in the parable of the strong man armed, keeping his palace in peace. In the other kingdom Christ reigns, which kingdom continually resists and wars against that of Satan, into which we are translated not by any power of our own, but by the grace of God, whereby we are delivered from this present evil world and are snatched from the power of darkness.

The knowledge and confession of these two kingdoms, which thus ever mutually war against each other with so much power and force, would alone be sufficient to confute the doctrine of free will, seeing that we are compelled to serve in the kingdom of Satan until we be liberated by a divine power. All this, I say, is known in common among Christians and fully confessed in their Proverbs, by their prayers, by their pursuits, and by their whole lives. Section 164 I omit to bring forward that truly Achillean scripture of mine, which the diatribe proudly passes by untouched.

I mean that which Paul teaches, Romans 7 and Galatians 5, that there is in the saints and in the godly so powerful a warfare between the spirit and the flesh that they cannot do what they would. From this warfare I argue thus. If the nature of man be so evil, even in those who are born again of the spirit, that it does not only endeavor after good, but is even averse to it, and militates against good, how should it endeavor after good in those who are not born again of the spirit, and who are still in the old man, and serve under Satan? Nor does Paul there speak of the grosser affections only, by means of which, as a common scape-gap, the diatribe is accustomed to get out of the way of all the scriptures.

But he enumerates among the works of the flesh heresy, idolatry, contentions, divisions, and so forth, which he describes as reigning in those most exalted faculties, that is, in the reason and the will. If therefore flesh with these affections war against the spirit in the saints, much more will it war against God in the ungodly, and in free will. Hence Romans 8, 7, he calls it, Amnesty against God.

I should like, I say, to see this argument of mine overturned, and free will defended against it. As to myself, I openly confess that I should not wish free will to be granted me, even if it could be so, nor anything else to be left in my own hands whereby I might endeavor something toward my own salvation. And that, not merely because in so many opposing dangers and so many assaulting devils I could not stand and hold it fast, in which state no man could be saved, seeing that one devil is stronger than all men, but because, even though there were no dangers, no conflicts, no devils, I should be compelled to labor under a continual uncertainty, and to beat the air only.

Nor would my conscience, even if I should live and work to all eternity, ever come to a settled certainty how much it ought to do in order to satisfy God. For whatever work should be done, there would still remain a scrupling, whether or not it pleased God, or whether He required anything

more, as is proved in the experience of all justiciaries, and as I myself learned to my bitter cost through so many years of my own experience. But now, since God has put my salvation out of the way of my will, and has taken it under His own, and has promised to save me not according to my working or manner of life, but according to His own grace and mercy, I rest fully assured and persuaded that He is faithful, and will not lie, and, moreover, great and powerful, so that no devils, no adversities can destroy Him or pluck me out of His hand.

No one, saith He, shall pluck them out of my hand, because my Father which gave them me is greater than all. John 10, 27-28 Hence it is certain that in this way, if all are not saved, yet some, yea, many shall be saved. Whereas by the power of free will, no one whatever could be saved, but all must perish together.

And, moreover, we are certain and persuaded that in this way we please God, not from the merit of our own works, but from the favor of His mercy promised unto us, and that if we work less or work badly, He does not impute it unto us, but, as a Father, pardons us and makes us better. This is the glory in which all the saints have in their God. Section 165 And if you are concerned about this, that it is difficult to defend the mercy and justice of God, seeing that He damns the undeserving, that is, those who are for that reason ungodly, because being born in iniquity they cannot by any means prevent themselves from being ungodly, and from remaining so, and being damned, but are compelled from the necessity of nature to sin and perish, as Paul saith, We all were the children of wrath, even as others.

Ephesians 2 3, when at the same time they were created such by God Himself from a corrupt seed by means of the sin of Adam. Here God is to be honored and revered as being most merciful towards those whom He justifies and saves under all their unworthiness, and it is to be in no small degree ascribed unto His wisdom, that He causes us to believe Him to be just, even where He appears to be unjust. For if His righteousness were such that it was considered to be righteousness according to human judgment, it would be no longer divine, nor would it in anything differ from human righteousness.

But as He is the one and true God, and moreover incomprehensible and inaccessible by human reason, it is right, nay, it is necessary, that His righteousness should be incomprehensible, even as Paul exclaims, saying, O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out. Romans 11.33 But they would be no longer past finding out if we were in all things able to see how they were righteous. What is man compared with God? What can our power do when compared with His power? What is our strength compared with His strength? What is our knowledge compared with His wisdom? What is our substance compared with His substance? In a word, what is all that we are compared with all that He is? If then we confess, according to the teaching of nature, that human power, strength, wisdom, knowledge, substance, and all human things together are nothing when compared with the divine power, strength, wisdom, knowledge, and substance, what perverseness must it be in us to attack the righteousness and judgments of God only, and to arrogate so much to our own judgment as to wish to comprehend, judge, and rate the divine judgments? Why do we not here in like manner say at once, What, is our judgment nothing when compared with the divine judgments? But ask reason herself if she is not from conviction compelled to confess that she is foolish and rash for not allowing the judgments of God to be incomprehensible, when she

confesses that all the other divine things are incomprehensible.

In everything else we concede to God a divine majesty, and yet are ready to deny it to His judgments. Nor can we for a little while believe that He is just, even when He promises that it will come to pass that when He shall reveal His glory, we shall all see and palpably feel that He ever was and is just. But I will produce an example that may go to confirm this faith, and to console that evil eye which suspects God of injustice.

Behold, God so governs this corporal world in external things that, according to human reason and judgment, you must be compelled to say either that there is no God, or that God is unjust. As a certain one saith, I am often tempted to think that there is no God. Forsee the great prosperity of the wicked, and on the contrary the great adversity of the good.

According to the testimony of the Proverbs and of experience the parent of all Proverbs, the more abandoned men are the more successful. The tabernacles of robbers, saith Job, prosper. And Psalm 73 complains that the sinners of the world abound in riches.

Is it not, I pray you, in the judgment of all most unjust, that the evil should be prosperous and the good afflicted? Yet so it is in the events of the world. And here it is that the most exalted minds have so fallen as to deny that there is any God at all, and to fable that fortune disposes all things at random. Such were Epicurus and Pliny.

And Aristotle, in order that he might make his first cause being free from every kind of misery, is of opinion that he thinks of nothing whatever but himself, because he considers that it must be most irksome to him to see so many evils and so many injuries. But the prophets themselves, who believed there is a God, were tempted still more concerning the injustice of God, as Jeremiah, Job, David, Asaph, and others. And what do you suppose Demosthenes and Cicero thought, who, after they had done all they could, received no other reward than a miserable death? And yet all this, which is so very much like injustice in God, when set forth in those arguments which no reason or light of nature can resist, is most easily cleared up by the light of the gospel, and the knowledge of grace, by which we are taught that the wicked flourish in their bodies, but lose their souls.

And the whole of this insolvable question is solved in one word. There is a life after this life, in which will be punished and repaid everything that is not punished and repaid here. For this life is nothing more than an entrance on and a beginning of that life which is to come.

If, then, even the light of the gospel, which stands in the word and in the faith only, is able to affect so much as with ease to do away with and settle this question which has been agitated through so many ages and never solved, how do you suppose matters will appear when the light of the word and of faith shall cease, and the essential truth itself shall be revealed in the Divine Majesty? Do you not suppose that the light of glory will then most easily solve that question which is now insolvable by the light of the word and of grace, even as the light of grace now easily solves that question which is insolvable by the light of nature? Let us therefore hold in consideration the three lights, the light of nature, the light of grace, and the light of glory, which is the common and very good distinction. By the light of nature it is insolvable how it can be just that a good man should be afflicted and the wicked should prosper. But this is solved by the light of grace.

By the light of grace it is insolvable how God can damn him who by his own powers can do nothing but sin and become guilty. Both the light of nature and the light of grace here say that the fault is not in the miserable man, but in the unjust God. Nor can they judge otherwise of that God who crowns the wicked man freely without any merit and yet crowns not but damns another, who is perhaps less or at least not more wicked.

But the light of glory speaks otherwise. That will show that God to whom alone belongeth the judgment of incomprehensible righteousness is of righteousness most perfect and most manifest, in order that we may in the meantime believe it, being admonished and confirmed by that example of the light of grace, which solves that which is as great a miracle to the light of nature. Conclusion.

Section 167. I shall here draw this book to a conclusion, prepared if it were necessary to pursue this discussion still farther, though I consider that I have now abundantly satisfied the godly man who wishes to believe the truth without making resistance. For if we believe it to be true that God foreknows and foreordains all things, that He can be neither deceived nor hindered in His prescience and predestination, and that nothing can take place but according to His will, which reason herself is compelled to confess, then, according to the testimony of reason herself, there can be no free will in man, in angel, or in any creature.

Hence, if we believe that Satan is the prince of this world, ever ensnaring and fighting against the kingdom of Christ with all his powers, and that he does not let go his captives without being forced by the divine power of the Spirit, it is manifest that there can be no such thing as free will. Again, if we believe that original sin has so destroyed us that even in the godly who are led by the Spirit it causes the utmost molestation by striving against that which is good, it is manifest that there can be nothing left in a man devoid of the Spirit which can turn itself towards good, but which must turn itself towards evil. Again, if the Jews, who followed after righteousness with all their powers, ran rather into unrighteousness, while the Gentiles, who followed after unrighteousness, attained unto a free righteousness which they never hoped for, it is equally manifest from their very works and from experience that man without grace can do nothing but will evil.

Finally, if we believe that Christ redeemed men by his blood, we are compelled to confess that the whole man was lost, otherwise we shall make Christ superfluous or a redeemer of the grossest part of man only, which is blasphemy and sacrilege. And now, my friend Erasmus, I entreat you, for Christ's sake, to perform what you promised. You promised that you would willingly yield to him who should teach you better than you knew.

Lay aside all respective persons. You, I confess, are great and adorned with many and those the most noble gifts of God, to say nothing of the rest, with talent, with erudition, and with eloquence to a miracle, whereas I have nothing and am nothing excepting that I glory in being almost a Christian. In this, moreover, I give you great praise and proclaim it.

You alone, in preeminent distinction from all others, have entered upon the thing itself, that is, the grand turning point of the cause, and have not wearied me with those irrelevant points about potpourri, purgatory, indulgences, and other like baubles, rather than causes with which all have hitherto tried to hunt me down, though in vain. You and you alone saw what was the grand hinge upon which the whole turned, and therefore you attacked the vital part at once, for which from my heart I thank you, for in this kind of discussion I willingly engage, as far as time and leisure permit

me. Had those who have heretofore attacked me done the same, and would those still do the same who are now boasting of new spirits and new revelations, we should have less sedition and sectarianism, and more peace and concord.

But thus has God, by the instrumentality of Satan, avenged our ingratitude. But, however, if you cannot manage this cause otherwise, then you have managed it in this diatribe. Do, I pray you, remain content with your own proper gift.

Study, adorn, and promote literature and languages, as you have hitherto done, to great advantage, and with much credit. In which capacity you have rendered me also a certain service, so much so that I confess myself to be much indebted to you, and in that character I certainly venerate and honestly respect you. But as to this our cause, to this God has neither willed nor given it you to be equal, though I entreat you not to consider this as spoken in arrogance.

No, I pray that the Lord may day by day make you as much superior to me in these matters as you are superior to me in all others. And it is no new thing for God to instruct a Moses by a Jethro, or to teach a Paul by an Ananias. And as to what you say, you have greatly missed the mark after all if you are ignorant of Christ.

You yourself, if I mistake not, know what that is. But all will not therefore err because you or I may err. God is glorified in his saints in a wonderful way, so that we may consider those saints who are the farthest from sanctity.

Nor is it an unlikely thing that you, as being man, should not rightly understand, nor with sufficient diligence weigh the Scriptures or the sayings of the fathers. Under which guides you imagine you cannot miss the mark. And that such is the case is quite manifest from this.

You are saying that you do not assert but collect. No man would write thus who was fully acquainted with and well understood his subject. On the contrary, I in this book of mine have collected things, but have asserted, and still do assert.

And I wish none to become judges, but all to yield assent. And may the Lord, whose cause this is, illuminate you, and make you a vessel to honour and to glory. Amen.

Phineas 1525 End of section 168

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
  - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**