

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 3.-Of God's Eternal Decree.

I. God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy Counsell of his own Will, freely, and unchangeably ordaine whatsoever comes to passe:¹ yet so as thereby neither is God the Author of sin,² nor is violence offered to the will of the Creatures, nor is the Liberty or contingencie of second Causes taken away, but rather established.³

Question 1.—*Are the decrees of God eternal?*

Answer.—Yes. Eph. 1:11. Because, 1.) Scripture ascribes eternity to them; e.g., Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:20. 2.) Acts 15:18 teaches that God's foreknowledge is eternal. If that is the case, then the decree upon which that foreknowledge is based must be eternal, Matt. 13:35. For God does not know anything future except by the decree, whereby they pass from a state of possibility into a state of futurity, Isa. 46:9, 10. 3.) If God's decrees were made only in time, he would take counsel as needed like the rational creatures Isa. 41:22, 23; Eph. 1:9. But this neither agrees with his perfect and infinite wisdom, nor with his absolute perfection and immutability, Ps. 147:5 (אֵין מִסְפָּר; there is no numbering). For the idea that he is susceptible to a new decree is as absurd as if something could happen to him unexpectedly, Jer. 32:19. 4.) Although God changes his dispensation towards men in time, either for good or for evil, it does not follow that the decree itself is changed or made only in time because this very change was decreed from eternity, Isa. 14:26, 27. Rather, these things are spoken in a manner accommodated to men, Isa. 5:19. They ought to be understood in a manner becoming God; not with respect to a change in God, but with respect to a change in his works, Mal. 3:6. Thus we understand the following passages: Jer. 18:10; 31:28; Deut. 28:63.

Question 2.—*Did God from all eternity, by the most holy, and wise Counsel of his Will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass?*

Answer.—Yes. Eph 1:11; Rom. 11:33; Heb. 6:17; Rom. 9:15, 18. Thus, we refute those who maintain that there are things which come to pass in time, apart from the decree of God; because we know this: 1.) From the knowledge of God, whereby from all eternity, he hath known all things infallibly, which come to pass, or shall be in time, Acts 15:18; John 21:17; Heb. 4:13. But all things, which come to pass in time, could not have been infallibly known from eternity, but in the Decree of his divine Will, Eph. 1:9. 2.) From God's natural way of working in time, 1 Cor. 12:6; Rom. 11:36, whence it is evident, that God works effectually and immediately in time all things which are done, Eph. 1:11; Isa. 45:1. But he works by his will those things, which he will have to be in time (after that manner, and in that time, how, and when they come to pass), Ps. 115:3. But that act of willing, cannot happen to God in time, but has been in him from all eternity, because God is unchangeable, Jas. 1:17. 3.) By enumerating several instances, concerning which, the Scripture affirms particularly, that they have been decreed by God: the sufferings and

¹ Eph. 1:11; Rom. 11:33; Heb. 6:17; Rom. 9:15, 18.

² Jas. 1:13, 17; 1 John 1:5.

³ Acts 2:23; Matt. 17:12; Acts 4:27, 28; John 19:11; Prov. 16:33.

death of Christ, Acts 2:23. The glorifying of those that are to be saved, Eph. 1:4, 5; 1 Thess. 5:9. And the foreordaining the rest to damnation to be punished for their sin, Jude 4. The like may be said of other things which come to pass in time, Ps. 33:11; 115:3; Isa. 46:10; Prov. 19:21.

Question 3—*Doth this decree make God the author of sin?*

Answer—No. Though God does decree the works of the ungodly, yet he does not exclude them from his precepts, *cf.* 2 Sam. 24:1 *with* 1 Chron. 21:1. For even though, when Absalom committed adultery with his father's wives, 2 Sam. 16:22, God willed to punish David's adultery with this shameful act, yet he did not for this reason bid the son to commit incest, Lev. 18:8. Absalom in acting thus, acted out of his own lust and deliberately broke God's command, Jas. 1:13, 14. Hence, we see three different agents working in Job's life; God, Satan, and wicked men (*i.e.*, the Sabeans and Chaldeans; Job 1&2). God's purpose is to try Job; Satan's purpose is to tempt Job to sin; and the Sabeans and Chaldeans are fulfilling their murderous lust and greed contrary to the law written in their hearts, Rom. 2:14, 15. Ultimately God's decree is the fountain of this activity, including all the actions involved—good and evil, but nowhere does he suspend his precept, thereby making lawful the works of the wicked, Prov. 16:4.

Question 4—*Doth this decree take away the liberty of the will, and the contingency of events?*

Answer—No. That the liberty and freedom of the will, and contingency of events (*i.e.*, secondary causes), is consistent with the Decree; is clear from Acts 2:23; Acts 3:17, 18; Acts 4:27, 28; Gen. 45:5; 50:20.