

MAN'S DEVICES AND THE LORD'S COUNSEL

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"There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." Proverbs 19:21

Divine sovereignty is stamped upon every page of the Scriptures. I do not mean that the doctrine of divine sovereignty is stated in every chapter of God's Word, but that we shall not find a chapter in which divine sovereignty may not, more or less, be traced. If we open, for instance, the prophecies, divine sovereignty is the basis of them all. If we read the historical books of the Old Testament, divine sovereignty is to be traced in the actions which are there recorded. If we look at the promises which are made to God's people, divine sovereignty is stamped upon them, for they all rest on the immutability of God's counsel; and therefore we may take almost any chapter of the Scriptures at random, and we shall find divine sovereignty engraved upon it.

But divine sovereignty is not merely a matter of **inference**—not merely a doctrine to be gathered from the prophecies and their fulfilment, from the lives of the patriarchs, or from the promises that God has given, and has accomplished to His people. If divine sovereignty were a matter of mere inference, the enemies of God's truth might challenge us to bring forward **direct** passages of Scripture, where the sovereignty of God is set forth; and, therefore, besides the general current of the Scriptures, we have express texts, so as to leave the enemies of God's truth without excuse, and to afford us power to answer their challenge, when they demand of us something more positive than inference. Thus we read, that the Lord will "fulfil all the good pleasure of His

goodness, and the work of faith with power" (2 Thess. 1:11); that He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11); that "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Dan. 4:35). And in the verse which I have just read, and from which I hope, with God's blessing, to deliver a few thoughts, we have the same doctrine declared, "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless **the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.**"

Now this doctrine of divine sovereignty, nature can never brook. It is so contrary and so repugnant to every feeling of our carnal minds, that nature will not submit to it as a truth from God. But say some, "I think you must be mistaken in this assertion. Is it not a matter of daily experience, and do we not hear from the mouths of ministers, yourself amongst them, that there are many characters in the professing Church of God, who have received the doctrine into their judgments, without feeling the power of it in their hearts?" Certainly. But is that any proof that nature can receive the doctrine of divine sovereignty?

Let those very persons who have received this doctrine into their judgment, be tried to the quick upon the point; let them be put, for instance, into that situation where Job was placed, let God "put forth His hand, and touch all that they have;" then those who have received the doctrine of divine sovereignty into their judgment, but have never had the feeling power of it in their hearts, would do that which Job did not, "curse God to His face." It is one thing to receive the doctrine as a doctrine, and another thing to submit to it as the truth of God; and no man knows this who has not felt God's eternal and unalterable counsels clash with the purposes of his heart and the intentions of his will, and

overturn well nigh every scheme and plan that he has chalked out; and so to have come, by inward experience, to the spot to which the Lord brought His prophet Jeremiah: "Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed" (Jer. 20:7). "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

Now the Lord, in these words, seems to open up to us a little of what the real state of the case is betwixt man and Himself. He gives us a glimpse of what is going on in the restless bosom of man; removes the veil, as it were, from that busy workshop, displays to us the artificer in full operation, and shows us what is transacting in that busy scene. "There are many devices in a man's heart;" and if you and I know anything of our hearts, we shall say, that God has well depicted what they are, and that which takes place in our minds, day by day, continually.

We gather also from these words that there is an opposition and a conflict betwixt the devices that are in a man's heart, and "the counsel of the Lord;" that these do not move parallel with one another—are not in strict accord—do not run side by side in concurrent harmony, but that there is an opposition betwixt the two; and yet, though there is this opposition betwixt the "devices in a man's heart" and "the counsel of the Lord," yet "the counsel of the Lord" must stand, and the "devices of a man's heart," when they are opposed to that counsel must go to wreck.

If we look a little through the Old Testament Scriptures, we shall see how the Lord frustrated, in a way of divine sovereignty, the devices that were in a man's heart. For instance, there was the device of the brethren of Joseph; their secret thought was to bring his dreams to nought, to frustrate, if it were possible, those intimations which the Lord

had miraculously given, and to overturn those purposes of God, whereby He was about to manifest Joseph's superiority and their inferiority. They had many devices in their hearts, but "the counsel of the Lord" stood; and He made use of their very device to sell Joseph into the hands of the Ishmaelites as a means to bring to pass that which He had purposed in His own eternal mind.

We have another striking instance in the case of Haman. Haman had purposed to cut off the whole nation of the Jews; that was the "device of his heart;" that was the darling project which he indulged in his mind, for the gratification of which he was willing to make the greatest sacrifices, and to run the greatest hazards. But "the counsel of the Lord" stood, and "the counsel of the Lord" was, that Haman should be hanged upon the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai; "the counsel of the Lord" was, that Mordecai should be "the man whom the king delighteth to honour," and that Haman, who hated him, should be the very person that should put that honour upon him.

But perhaps the conduct of the Jews, when Christ was upon earth, was one of the most striking instances of the devices in a man's heart, and yet of "the counsel of the Lord" standing in opposition to these devices. What was their infernal project? It was utterly to destroy and get rid of Him, who, by His preaching "tormented" them; it was to remove Him out of the way, by putting Him to a violent death. Well, these devices in part succeeded. They were allowed to do that which they had purposed, but the Lord wonderfully overruled the very devices of their hearts, that they, by fulfilling their own purposes, might fulfil His and that His counsel might yet stand, though their devices seemed for a time to succeed.

Now, these which I have mentioned, are cases in **unregenerate** men, but we find it also to stand good in **regenerate men**, that "there are many devices in a man's heart," but that "the counsel of the Lord" alone shall stand. What a crafty device there was in David's heart, to hide his adultery! What base methods he took to conceal that crime from coming to light! But "the counsel of the Lord" was that that crime should come to light, that it should be made manifest before the eyes of men; and therefore, whatever were the devices of David's heart, the Lord took care that His "counsel should stand."

So in the case of Abraham and Sarah, there was a device in their hearts, that they should have a son in some way which was not appointed of the Lord, that they should hurry the Lord's work, and hasten the Lord's time, and thus introduce the child of promise, not, as the Lord had purposed, in a way of miracle, but in a way accordant with nature. Such was the device of their hearts, but "the counsel of the Lord still was made to stand." Isaac must be the seed of promise; and their devices, in a measure, succeeding, only served to introduce bondage and misery into their house.

But to come to those particulars which more immediately concern ourselves.

Let us look then at a child of God, before the Lord is pleased to quicken his soul into spiritual life. Though dead in sin, he is "a vessel of mercy afore prepared unto glory," yea, chosen before the foundation of the world as a vessel, to be made meet for the master's use. But how many devices are there in that man's heart, to frustrate the purposes of God concerning him! How he would have damned his soul a thousand times, if the Lord had let him! How he was suspended continually, as it were, by a hair, over the very

brink of the precipice, and how in those times, though he knew not the Lord, yet still the Lord "girded him," as He girt Cyrus (Isa. 45:5), and he was preserved in Christ, before he was "called" (Jude 1:1) to the knowledge of "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent!"

All through the life, then, of a vessel of mercy, before the Lord calls him by His grace, there is the standing of "the counsel of the Lord," in opposition to the "devices" that have been working in that man's heart. But we will now look at him, just a little before the Lord begins the work of grace upon his soul. I believe in most cases, there is a concurrence of providential circumstances, often in a way of affliction; the Lord perhaps brings down the body by disease, or removes some idol, or cuts off the desire of his eyes at a stroke, or brings him into circumstances of temporal distress, and thus, usually speaking, there are some concurrent circumstances, which, though they do not prepare a man's heart to receive grace **for "the preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord"**, yet they put a man into a certain posture, place him in a certain position which is the most suitable place for God to meet his soul in, and to visit him with the Holy Spirit.

Well then, here is one whom the Lord is about to meet with His grace—whom He is about to quicken into spiritual life. Now the Lord shall perhaps give a stab to all that man's worldly prospects; he shall make, as it were, a cut at every fond desire and every airy vision and every lofty castle, which that man is endeavouring to erect: or He shall bring sickness and disease upon him; or some cutting disappointment, so as to separate him from the world;—so that the things of time and sense shall wear a sickly aspect, and he shall find no pleasure, and take no comfort in them. Yet all this time the man is devoid of spiritual life—destitute of the grace of God, but still, through a concurrence of

providential circumstances, brought into that posture, and into that place where the grace of God, when it comes into his heart, will find him in a position suitable to receive it.

I have often thought of the way in which the Lord seemed pleased to begin His work of grace in my heart. I was, at that time, a young man at Oxford, not indeed what is called "a gay young man"—not living an immoral life, but still utterly dead in sin, "without God and without hope in the world," looking forward to prospects in life, surrounded by worldly companions, and knowing as well as caring absolutely nothing spiritually for the things of God. Well, the Lord, in His mysterious providence, removed me from that place, and took me to Ireland, contrary to the wishes of my friends, and shut me up, as it were, for more than a year and a half away from the society of the world, brought me into great natural affliction of mind, and then, in that affliction of mind He was pleased, as I trust, to communicate His grace to my soul, and quicken me into spiritual life.

Now I have looked sometimes with wonder upon the circumstance of His taking me from all my former companions, and putting me there in quietness and solitude. When life came, this quiet and secluded nook seemed to be like a little nursery, where the infant plant of grace might for a while be fostered, before I was thrust out into a rude world. It seemed to be a little spot, where the Lord might not merely begin His work of grace, but strengthen it in some measure, that when I was thrown back amongst my old companions, I might have power sufficient to resist their wiles, and that I might be separated, as indeed I most effectually was, from them. And thus looking at the Lord's dealing with my own soul, and at His way of working with others, I have sometimes seen what a concurrence there has been of providential circumstances, which, though they were

not grace, yet were so necessary in the chain of divine appointments, that could one link have been broken, the whole chain must have fallen to the ground.

But we pass on to look at the first beginning of the work of grace upon that man's soul whose case we are attempting to describe. "There are many devices in that man's heart" when the Lord first begins with him—and one of his first devices is to please God, and to work out a righteousness which shall be acceptable in His holy and pure eyes. Not knowing in its full extent the breadth and spirituality of God's law, not being deeply and powerfully acquainted with the corruptions of fallen nature, not being led into "the chambers of imagery," so as to see all the idolatrous tracings upon the wall, he seeks for the most part to establish his own righteousness, and thus, in some manner, to conciliate the favour of God.

Well here is a device in a man's heart; but the "counsel of the Lord" is that he shall not establish that righteousness, that he shall not "find his hands," that his attempt shall not prosper; and therefore by bringing powerful convictions into his conscience, by thrusting "the sword of the Spirit" into his "joints and marrow," by laying open the requisitions and spirituality of His holy law to his soul, He frustrates those devices, He roots up those plans, He breaks down those airy castles; and this foolish creature, who was fostering a pleasing device, in some way to gain God's favour, He levels and prostrates as a ruined wretch before Him. Well then the devices of this man's heart have been frustrated.

He has been trying to gain the favour of God, and instead of gaining the favour of God by his righteousness, he only finds himself farther from the mark than ever. He has been trying some method to conciliate God's favour, and to please Him, and to serve Him, love, honour and obey Him; and yet the

more he labours in tugging and rowing his boat against the stream, the more violently does the current of sin come down, to bear him away from the point to which he is aiming, and carry him into a wide and vast sea, where he has neither chart, nor rudder, nor compass. Then, in this state "he knows not what to do;" he comes, as the Psalmist says, to "his wit's end" (Ps. 107:27). If he cannot please God by his own righteousness, he knows no other method of gaining his favour; for Christ, at this time, is not made known to him, he has no spiritual acquaintance with the sacrifice of the Son of God; his eyes have not been anointed, so as to discover any glimpse of that righteousness, which is unto all, and upon all them that believe. Therefore, in this bewildered state, he comes to "his wit's end," feeling that the only thing that he knows of to gain God's favour is effectually frustrated, that all his props are removed, and all his confidence clean taken away.

"The counsel of the Lord" then, is that Christ should be made known to this man. The Lord has two grand outlines of divine counsel in this matter, for though they in effect centre in one, yet, as far as our experience is concerned, there are two. The one, the humbling and breaking down of the creature into nothingness; the other, the exalting and setting up of Christ upon the wreck and ruin of the creature. Then "the counsel of the Lord" is, that Christ should be set up in this poor creature's heart, that the Lord of life and glory should be exalted in his broken spirit and contrite soul. And therefore He brings Christ near, He raises up faith in the soul, whereby Christ is apprehended, He drops in some sensations of Christ's preciousness, and bedews the conscience with some drops of the Saviour's atoning blood, whereby a measure of divine peace is experienced, a sense of heavenly love is enjoyed, an embracing of the Saviour in the arms of faith is experimentally known.

Now, as "the devices in a man's heart" are many, there is a new device that comes into the heart of the soul whom the Lord has thus blessedly healed by atoning blood, which is, to maintain those sweet views which he has experienced, to keep firm and safe hold of these sensations which he has enjoyed, and not to lose out of his heart that taste of pleasure which he is experiencing. These are the "devices in the man's heart," but "the counsel of the Lord" shall stand in spite of all these devices. "The counsel of the Lord" is that Christ should be all in all, that He should stand exalted upon the wreck and ruin of the creature.

Now, when the soul is brought to know a little of Christ's atoning blood, and to have by faith a sight and an enjoyment of Christ's glorious righteousness, it does not see what a secret fund there is of creature strength in the heart, nor what inward pride and self-righteousness are working up from the bottom of the carnal mind. It does not see that self has not yet been thoroughly humbled and abased, nor yet Christ made known in that way in which He is to be made known hereafter. And therefore the creature not being at this time humbled, the devices in this man's heart are, to retain that which the Lord has given, to keep firm hold of that which the Lord has put into his hand; and by his spirituality of mind, earnestness in prayer, continually searching God's Word, abstaining from "all appearance of evil," and living to the best of his power to God's glory, to maintain firm possession of that which has been given him by God.

But "the counsel of the Lord" is, that the creature should learn its weakness, that helplessness should not be a mere doctrine received into the judgment, but that it should be a solemn truth which is experienced in a man's soul. This weakness a man can only learn by being placed in that position, where, when he would make use of his strength, he

finds it is all gone, and is become perfect weakness. Little by little his sweet sensations evaporate; little by little he loses the light and life and consolation and peace, which has been enjoyed; little by little he is not so spiritual as he was, nor so earnest at "the throne of grace;" the Word of God does not seem so precious, the companionship of the people of God not so eagerly sought after, and the ordinances of God's house lose their relish. And as these heavenly feelings disappear, and get dispersed out of a man's heart, there arises a succession of very different things which come to take their room. As spirituality diminishes, worldliness increases; as humility abates, pride resumes strength; as the sight of Christ's righteousness is diminished, his own righteousness rises to view; and as the Lord's favour is less sweetly and blessedly felt, there must be a kind of making up for it by some work of the creature.

Well then, here are "devices in this man's heart," but "the counsel of the Lord shall stand." And "the counsel of the Lord," is this, to exalt Christ upon the abasement of the creature, to make the strength of Christ perfect in our weakness, and the wisdom of Christ perfect in our folly, and to establish Christ's righteousness upon the ruin of the creature's righteousness. Now the man does not understand what the Lord is about, in frustrating his devices, and establishing His own counsel; nor does he see what the Lord is really doing, by leading him into this strange mysterious path; nor can he readily believe that the Lord is working at all, because His hand is concealed. But the Lord's work is to pull down as much as to build up, to root out as much as to plant, to bring the beggar to the dung-hill just as much as to raise him amongst princes, and exalt him to a throne of glory; it is just as much His work to kill as to make alive, to make poor as to make rich, to reduce to hunger as to "feed with the bread of life," and to cast the soul down into the

dust of self-abasement, as to lift it up by a sweet manifestation of Christ.

"The counsel of the Lord," then must stand, whatever be the devices in this man's heart; and this counsel is to bring the creature low, that he may exalt Jesus high, to strip the creature of all its attainments, to pluck out the peacock-feathers, that it may be poor and needy and naked and empty and bare. Well now, when a man is in this state, he will begin to sigh and cry and to groan unto God "being burdened." And now, perhaps, a fresh device will work in his heart, "Oh, now that I am groaning to the Lord, the blessing will soon come; now that I am humbled, and lying at the foot of the cross, surely the Lord cannot be very far from me. Am I not just the character that the Lord has described in His Word, 'poor and needy'? Do I not stand before Him an undone wretch? Surely the Lord will appear very shortly." Now these are some of the devices that are in this man's heart, but "the counsel of the Lord" is distinct from this man's devices, and "the counsel of the Lord shall stand."

Not deep enough yet; there must be another plunge down into the billows. The creature is not stripped enough yet; self-righteousness is not taken away enough yet; self-sufficiency is not broken down enough yet. Another stripping must yet take place, another crushing into the dust, another breaking up and breaking down, another bringing the soul lower than ever it was before. The delay then of this answer to his prayers, the Lord not appearing just when he wants Him to appear, slighting his requests, denying a listening ear to his cry, hiding Himself altogether, not giving him any glimpse of His countenance, and drawing back as he would fain draw near—all these things so puzzle, and seem to be so opposed to the "devices in a man's heart," that he is brought into a greater strait than ever he was before.

And now he seems brought to this point, **that he never shall have the blessing at all**; that as the manifestation has been so long delayed, as the Lord does not appear when he calls upon Him, as He hides His face so from him, and will not be prevailed upon by any of his petitions to give him one look of mercy, the Lord never will come; and he says, "Surely all my past experience must have been a delusion. It could not have been from God. My liberty must have been false liberty. My peace must have been false peace. My joy must have been the joy of the hypocrite. It never could have been from God, or else I should not be in that miserable state in which I am now." Well, the device in this man's heart now is that his experience is not of God.

The device in his heart before, was, that he was so humble, that the Lord was going to appear immediately; but now when the Lord has given him another plunge, brought him deeper still, he says, "the Lord will not appear at all." But, however many be the devices in a man's heart, "the counsel of the Lord still shall stand;" and that counsel shall be to come with favour, to give him some sweet discovery of Christ, to bring a sense of reconciliation into his soul, to revive his spirit, and to make Christ ten thousand times more precious and ten thousand times more lovely than He was before. Well then, this "counsel of the Lord shall stand," whatever be the devices in a man's heart that stand in opposition to it. And we almost always find that all "the counsels of the Lord" stand in opposition to our devices, and that all our devices must be frustrated, in order that "the counsel of the Lord" should stand.

We will go a little farther. The devices of our heart are generally to find some easy, smooth, flowery path. Whatever benefits we have derived from affliction, whatever mercies we have experienced in tribulation, the flesh hates and

shrinks from such a path with perfect abhorrence. And, therefore, there is always a secret devising in a man's heart, to escape the cross, to avoid affliction, and to walk in some flowery meadow, away from the rough road which cuts his feet, and wearies his limbs.

Now then, in the execution of this device, a man shall sometimes come to this point, "I have had a good experience, I have known the Lord, I have felt the power of the gospel, I have tasted the misery of sin, as well as the sweetness of Christ; the Lord has delivered me in many instances, He has blessed my soul in many difficult and dangerous straits, He has raised up in my heart confidence in Him. Well now, why should I not stand in this liberty? Why should I not rest in this experience? Why should I not take up my firm footing upon that ground, which the Lord seems to have set my feet upon?" Here then is a "device in a man's heart," and this device in his heart he will try to execute—that is, instead of being, day by day, a poor, needy, naked wretch who wants deliverance; instead of being, day by day, a helpless creature, who needs the help of the Most High; instead of carrying the cross, suffering tribulation, and walking in a path of temptation and distress, he rests upon the old experience, and takes a natural and carnal footing upon that former work, without the Lord, from time to time, leading him into fresh experience of his mercy, by leading him into fresh experience of his own misery.

Now, I believe that there are some good men in that spot. We read of persons being "at ease in Zion;" well, they are "at ease in Zion," not at ease in Sinai, nor at ease in Egypt, but they are at ease in Zion. And there are sometimes gracious men who have had a good experience, and have been led by God Himself into an acquaintance with the truth, and yet the Lord for wise purposes ceasing to exercise them, and to

plunge them into tribulation, they get into a carnal state, resting upon their former experience, without, having daily instruction from the Lord Himself, and being continually led into those paths in which, and in which alone, Christ is really precious and suitable.

It resembles the case of a man who has been wading through deep poverty. When he was struggling through this slough, if he was a child of God, he knew much of God's providence, and when wonderful help came to him in most trying straits, he would bless, thank, and praise God for succouring him in these difficulties. But the man has emerged from this miry path; he is now settled in some good measure of worldly prosperity. Does he want a God of providence any more? Does he want the postman to bring a letter to his door, containing the very sum which he needed to pay his rent, lest he be dragged to a prison? No. All he has to do is to open his strong box, or to go to his banker, in order to pay every man his own, and discharge every bill. Then a God of providence is no longer known to him as before.

Well, so it is, in an analogous way, with the man who has been deeply exercised and tried in grace. His very deep exercises, his very painful trials, have been a means of showing him what a God of grace is, because they have so emptied his heart, that nothing but grace would do to come in, and fill that empty spot. Then when grace has come, it has so thoroughly filled up the void, the heavenly tenon has so sweetly fitted in with the cut mortise, that there was a sweet reception of "the truth as it is in Jesus," an embracing of it with all the strength of affection that he had. But when a man gets out of the trying path, when he gets into those circumstances spiritually, that I have been describing **naturally**, why then, just as there he lost sight of a God of

providence, so, in a great measure, here he loses sight of a God of grace. Therefore, nothing but trials and exercises and temptations and distresses, can ever make a man know a God of grace, in the same way as nothing but temporal poverty can make a man acquainted with a God of providence.

But though some of God's people are suffered to walk in this easy path, yet there are those whom He will not suffer thus to be "at ease in Zion," and the devices of whose hearts He frustrates by causing His own counsel to stand; for He has "chosen Zion in the furnace of affliction," He has purposed that His people should pass through the fire, he has chosen "an afflicted and poor people, that they should trust in the Lord;" and there, fore, though the Lord does see fit, that some shall be like those described in Amos, who "stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock," yet He takes care that there shall be a remnant of His people that shall be sorely exercised and oppressed and troubled and distressed in their minds, so as to bring them, day by day, to a feeling necessity of a God of all grace, to bless, teach and comfort them.

Another "device in a man's heart" is, that he shall have worldly prosperity; that his children shall grow up around him, and when they grow up, he shall be able to provide for them in a way which shall be best suited to their station in life; that they shall enjoy health and strength and success; and that there shall not be any cutting affliction in his family, or fiery trial to pass through. Now these devices the Lord frustrates. What grief, what affliction, what trouble, is the Lord continually bringing into men's families! Their dearest objects of affection removed from them, at the very moment when they seemed clasped nearest around their hearts! and those who are spared, perhaps, growing up in such a

searedness of conscience and hardness of heart, and, perhaps, profligacy of life, that even their very presence is often a burden to their parents instead of a blessing; and the very children who should be their comfort, thorns and briars in their sides! Oh, how the Lord overturns and brings to nought the "devices of a man's heart" to make a paradise here upon earth.

Again, a man in his fleshly mind is generally devising some method or other, whereby he may escape a practical subjection to the gospel—some way or other whereby he may escape walking in the path of self-denial and mortification of the flesh, and crucifixion of "the old man with the affections and lusts." He is generally seeking some way or other to indulge the flesh, and yet, at the same time, to stand in gospel liberty, to have everything that can gratify his carnal mind, and, at the same time, have a well-grounded hope of eternal life. But the Lord says, "No, these two things are not compatible; he that shall live with Christ must die with Christ; he that shall reign with Christ must suffer with Christ; he that shall wear the crown must carry the cross." So that whatever devices there be in a man's heart, or whatever ways and plans he shall undertake to bring his devices to pass, "the counsel of the Lord that shall stand."

When a man is brought to the right spot, and is in a right mind to trace out the Lord's dealings with him from the first, he sees it was a kind hand which "blasted his gourds, and laid them low;" it was a kind hand that swept away his worldly prospects—which reduced him to natural as well as to spiritual poverty—which led him into exercises, trials, sorrows, griefs, and tribulations; because, in those trials he has found the Lord, more or less, experimentally precious.

"Many are the devices of a man's heart." Now you have all your devices; that busy workshop is continually putting out some new pattern; some new fashion is continually starting forth from the depths of that ingenious manufactory which you carry about with you, and you are wanting this, and expecting that, and building up airy castles, and looking for that which shall never come to pass: for "many are the devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord that shall stand;" and so far as you are children of God, that counsel is a counsel of wisdom and mercy. The purposes of God's heart are purposes of love and affection toward you, and therefore you may bless and praise God, that whatever be the devices of your hearts against God's counsel, they shall be frustrated, that He may do His will and fulfil all His good pleasure.