

George Whitefield to John Wesley: "No, dear Sir, you mista

**A Letter  
from  
George Whitefield  
to the  
Rev. Mr. John Wesley**

IN ANSWER TO MR. WESLEY'S SERMON ENTITLED  
"Free Grace"

*"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to b*  
(Iain Murray has written [an excellent article](#) explaining the historical background of this exchange between Whitefie

**PREFACE**

I am very well aware what different effects publishing this letter against the dear Mr. W  
produce. Many of my friends who are strenuous advocates for *universal redemption* w  
offended. Many who are zealous on the other side will be much rejoiced. They who ar  
and are carried away with carnal reasoning will wish this matter had never been broug

The reasons I have given at the beginning of the letter, I think are sufficient to satisfy a  
desire therefore that they who hold election would not triumph, or make a party on one  
such thing)—and that they who are prejudiced against that doctrine be not too much co  
the other.

Known unto God are all his ways from the beginning of the world. The great day will  
permits dear Mr. Wesley and me to be of a different way of thinking. At present, I sha  
that matter, beyond the account which he has given of it himself in the following letter  
from his own dear hands:

*My dear Brother,*

*I thank you for yours, May the 24th. The case is quite plain. There are bigots both for  
it. God is sending a message to those on either side. But neither will receive it, unless*

*own opinion. Therefore, for a time you are suffered to be of one opinion, and I of another. If we both come, God will do what man cannot, namely, make us both of one mind. Then persecution will be seen whether we count our lives dear unto ourselves, so that we may finish our course. I am, my dearest brother,*

*Ever yours,*

*J. WESLEY*

Thus my honoured friend, I heartily pray God to hasten the time, for his being clearly and fully confirmed in the doctrines of divine revelation, that we may thus be closely united in principle and judgment, and affection. And then if the Lord should call us to it, I care not if I go with him to prison, as Paul and Silas, I hope we shall sing praises to God, and count it our highest honour to suffer, and lay down our lives for the brethren.

## **WHITEFIELD'S LETTER TO WESLEY**

Bethesda

Reverend and very dear Brother,

God only knows what unspeakable sorrow of heart I have felt on your account since I have seen you. If it be my infirmity or not, I frankly confess, that Jonah could not go with more reluctance than I do now take pen in hand to write against you. Was nature to speak, I had rather die than do so. But faithful to God, and to my own and others' souls, I must not stand neutral any longer. I must declare that our common adversaries will rejoice to see us differing among ourselves. But what is the danger of God are in danger of falling into error. Nay, numbers *have* been misled, whom God has blessed upon by my ministry, and a greater number are still calling aloud upon me to show also. I will show that I know no man after the flesh, and that I have no respect to persons, any further than my duty to my Lord and Master, *Jesus Christ*.

This letter, no doubt, will lose me many friends: and for this cause perhaps God has laid this trial upon me, even to see whether I am willing to forsake all for him, or not. From such considerations I will show my duty to bear an humble testimony, and earnestly to plead for the truths which, I am persuaded, are revealed in the Word of God. In the defence whereof I must use great plainness of speech.

friends upon earth with the greatest simplicity, faithfulness, and freedom, leaving the care to God.

For some time before, and especially since my last departure from England, both in preaching and printing, you have been propagating the doctrine of *universal redemption*. How Paul reproved Peter for his dissimulation, I fear I have been sinfully silent too long with me, dear and honoured Sir, if now I deliver my soul, by telling you that I think in

'Tis not my design to enter into a long debate on God's decrees. I refer you to Dr. Edwards, which, I think is unanswerable—except in a certain point, concerning a *middle sort* between which he himself in effect afterwards condemns.

I shall only make a few remarks upon your sermon, entitled *Free Grace*." And before I say myself, give me leave to take a little notice of what in your Preface you term an indisposition to be public to all the world. I must own, that I always thought you were quite mistaken up

The case (you know) stands thus: When you were at Bristol, I think you received a letter charging you with not preaching the gospel, because you did not preach up election. Upon which the answer was "*preach and print*." I have often questioned, as I do now, whether in so doing the Lord. A due exercise of religious prudence, without [the drawing of] a lot, would have been the matter. Besides, I never heard that you enquired of God, whether or not election was a

But, I fear, taking it for granted [that election was not a biblical truth], you only enquired whether to be silent or preach and print against it.

However this be, the lot came out "*preach and print*"; accordingly you preached and printed. In my desire, you suppressed the publishing of the sermon whilst I was in England; but you published it in the world after my departure. O that you had kept it in! However, if that sermon was printed, it is not apt to think, one reason why God should so suffer you to be deceived, was, that hereby you might be laid upon me, faithfully to declare the Scripture doctrine of election, that thus I might have a fresh opportunity of seeing what was in my heart, and whether I would be true to his commandment. I cannot but grant, he did once before, by giving you such another lot at Deal.

The morning I sailed from Deal for Gibraltar [2 February 1738], you arrived from Geo

an opportunity to converse with you, though the ship was not far off the shore, you drew set forward to London. You left a letter behind you, in which were words to this effect by the wind which was carrying you out, brought me in, I asked counsel of God. His answer was, "Let him return to London." This was a piece of paper, in which were written these words, "Let him return to London."

When I received this, I was somewhat surprised. Here was a good man telling me he would have me return to London. On the other hand, I knew my call was to Georgia, and I was a friend of London, and could not justly go from the soldiers, who were committed to my charge, to my friend to prayer. That passage in 1 Kings 13 was powerfully impressed upon my soul, that the Prophet was slain by a lion when he was tempted to go back (contrary to God's express command) the Prophet's telling him God would have him do so. I wrote you word that I could not return to London immediately.

Some months after, I received a letter from you at Georgia, wherein you wrote words to this effect, "God never before gave me a wrong lot, yet, perhaps, he suffered me to have such a lot given me, as was in your heart." I should never have published this private transaction to the world, but you call me to it. It is plain you had a wrong lot given you here, and justly, because you tempted God. And thus I believe it is in the present case. And if so, let not the children of God who are your friends, and also advocates for *universal redemption*, think that doctrine true—because of your compliance with a lot given out from God.

This, I think, may serve as an answer to that part of the Preface to your printed sermon, "Nothing but the strongest conviction, not only that what is here advanced is the truth, but that I am indispensably obliged to declare this truth to all the world." That you believe to be truth, and that you honestly aim at God's glory in writing, I do not in the least doubt; but I cannot but think you have been much mistaken in imagining that your tempting God, by the manner you did could lay you under an *indispensable obligation* to any action, much less to that against the doctrine of *predestination to life*.

I must next observe, that as you have been unhappy in printing at all upon such an *imaginary* text, you have been as unhappy in the choice of your text. Honoured Sir, how could it enter into your mind to print a text to disprove the doctrine of election out of Romans 8, where this doctrine is so plainly spoken with a Quaker upon this subject, and he had no other way of evading the force of the text than by saying, "I believe Paul was in the wrong." And another friend lately, who was an advocate against election, ingenuously confessed that he used to think St. Paul himself was mistaken in the truly translated.

Indeed, honoured Sir, it is plain beyond all contradiction that St. Paul, through the whole of his epistle, is speaking of the privileges of those only who are really in Christ. And let any unprejudiced man read the text before and what follows your text, and he must confess the word "all" only signifies the elect. The latter part of the text plainly proves, what, I find, dear Mr. Wesley will, by no means deny, is the *perseverance* of the children of God: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered himself up for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works, [He shall abundantly recompense us for all things] how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). [He shall abundantly recompense us for all things, in particular, to enable us to persevere, and every thing else necessary to carry us home to glory, and to the kingdom.]

Had any one a mind to prove the doctrine of *election*, as well as of *final perseverance*, your text is a text more fit for his purpose than that which you have chosen to disprove it! One who is not without some suspicion that you were aware of this, for after the first paragraph, I scarce know whether you intended to [disprove the text] so much as once through your whole sermon.

But your discourse, in my opinion, is as little to the purpose as your text, and instead of doing what you intended, and more confirm me in the belief of the doctrine of God's *eternal election*.

I shall not mention how illogically you have proceeded. Had you written clearly, you should have proved your proposition: "God's grace is free to all." And then by way of inference you should have exclaimed against what you call *the horrible decree*. But you knew that people (because they have so much abounded among us) were generally prejudiced against the doctrine of *reprobation*, and thought if you kept up their dislike of that, you could overthrow the doctrine of *election*. In doubt, the doctrine of election and reprobation must stand or fall together.

But passing by this, as also your equivocal definition of the word *grace*, and your false definition of *free*, and that I may be as short as possible, I frankly acknowledge: I believe the doctrine of *election*, in your view, that God intends to give saving grace, through Jesus Christ, only to a certain number of mankind, after the fall of Adam, being justly left of God to continue in sin, will at last be paid, which is its proper wages.

This is the established doctrine of Scripture, and acknowledged as such in the 17th article of the Creed of England, as Bishop Burnet himself confesses. Yet dear Mr. Wesley absolutely denies it.

But the most important objections you have urged against this doctrine as reasons why seriously considered, and faithfully tried by the Word of God, will appear to be of no force. They shall be humbly and calmly reviewed, as to the following heads:

**First**, you say that if this be so (*i.e.*, if there be an election) then is all preaching vain: for they that are elected; for they, whether with preaching or without, will infallibly be saved. Therefore preaching to save souls is void with regard to them. And it is useless to them that are not elected, for they will not be saved. They, whether with preaching or without, will infallibly be damned. The end of preaching is void with regard to them likewise. So that in either case our preaching is vain, and you are wrong in 10, paragraph 9.

O dear Sir, what kind of reasoning—or rather sophistry—is this! Hath not God, who has appointed a certain number, appointed also the preaching of the Word as a means to bring them to that election in any other sense? And if so, how is preaching needless to them that are elected? And who designated by God himself to be the power of God unto their eternal salvation? And since we are elect and who reprobate, we are to preach promiscuously to all. For the Word may be useful to the elect, in restraining them from much wickedness and sin. However, it is enough to excite them in preaching and hearing, when we consider that by these means, some, even as many as will, shall to eternal life, shall certainly be quickened and enabled to believe. And who that attends with reverence and care, can tell but he may be found of that happy number?

**Second**, you say that the doctrine of election and reprobation directly tends to destroy the efficacy of all the ordinances of God. For (says the dear mistaken Mr. Wesley) "it wholly takes away the hope to follow after it, so frequently proposed in Scripture. The hope of future reward, and the hope of heaven, and the fear of hell, et cetera."

I thought that one who carries perfection to such an exalted pitch as dear Mr. Wesley does, a true lover of the Lord Jesus Christ would strive to be holy for the sake of being holy, and out of love and gratitude, without any regard to the rewards of heaven, or fear of hell. You refer to Scougal says, "Love's a more powerful motive that does them move." But passing by the rewards and punishments (as they certainly are) may be motives from which a Christian is stirred up to act for God, how does the doctrine of election destroy these motives? Do not the rewards of good works they do, the greater will be their reward? And is not that encouragement and cause them to persevere in working for Jesus Christ? And how does the doctrine of election destroy holiness? Who ever preached any other election than what the Apostle preached, when he says, "Be ye holy, as he who has called you through sanctification of the Spirit?" (2 Thess. 2:13). Nay, is not holiness made a mark of the elect? And how then can the doctrine of election destroy holiness?

The instance which you bring to illustrate your assertion, indeed, dear Sir, is quite impertinent. A sick man knows that he must unavoidably die or unavoidably recover, though he know not which. Is it reasonable to take any physic at all." Dear Sir, what absurd reasoning is here? Were you in that case, so, did not the bare probability or possibility of your recovering, though you knew it was not certain, you must live or die, encourage you to take physic? For how did you know but that very physic which means God intended to recover you by?

Just thus it is as to the doctrine of election. I know that it is unalterably fixed (one may be either damned or saved; but since I know not which for a certainty, why should I not strive, though I know not of nature, since I know not but this striving may be the means God has intended to bring me into a state of grace?

Dear Sir, consider these things. Make an impartial application, and then judge what little I may conclude the 10th paragraph, page 12, with these words: "So directly does this doctrine tend to hinder of holiness in general, to hinder unholy men from ever approaching thereto, or striving

"As directly," you say, "does the doctrine tend to destroy several particular branches of holiness, as meekness, love, et cetera." I shall say little, dear Sir, in answer to this paragraph. Dear Sir, I have been disputing with some warm narrow-spirited men that held election, and then he inquired, "Was the narrowness of spirit was owing to their principles? But does not dear Mr. Wesley know that God, who are predestinarians, and yet are meek, lowly, pitiful, courteous, tender-hearted, full of spirit, and hope to see the most vile and profligate of men converted? And why? because they are elected themselves by an act of his electing love, and they know not but he may have elected to convert the most abandoned.

But, dear Sir, we must not judge of the truth of principles in general, nor of this of election, from the practice of some that profess to hold them. If so, I am sure much might be said in your appeal to your own heart, whether or not you have not felt in yourself, or observed in others, a narrow-spiritedness, and some disunion of soul respecting those that hold *universal redemption* according to your own rule, *universal redemption* is *wrong*, because it destroys several branches of holiness, as meekness, love, et cetera. But not to insist upon this, I beg you would observe that you are set aside by the force of the Apostle's argument, and the language which he expressly uses. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

Here we see that the Apostle exhorts them to put on bowels of mercy, kindness, humble long-suffering, et cetera, upon this consideration: namely, because they were elect of God, and experientially felt this doctrine in their hearts feel that these graces are the genuine effects of God.

But perhaps dear Mr. Wesley may be mistaken in this point, and call that passion which is for the truth. You know, dear Sir, the Apostle exhorts us to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Therefore you must not condemn all that appear zealous for the doctrine of election, or persecutors, just because they think it their duty to oppose you. I am sure, I love you for Christ, and think I could lay down my life for your sake; but yet, dear Sir, I cannot help opposing your errors upon this important subject, because I think you warmly, though not designly, are in the wrong, it is in Jesus. May the Lord remove the scales of prejudice from off the eyes of your mind according to true Christian knowledge!

**Third**, says your sermon, "This doctrine tends to destroy the comforts of religion, the peace of the mind, et cetera."

But how does Mr. Wesley know this, who never believed election? I believe they who agree with our 17th article, that "the godly consideration of predestination, and election, is a most sweet, pleasant, unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the love of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing their hearts to heavenly things, as well because it does greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal life, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God," et cetera.

This plainly shows that our godly reformers did not think election destroyed holiness or comfort. As for my own part, this doctrine is my daily support. I should utterly sink under a dreary and desolate prospect, were I not firmly persuaded that God has chosen me in Christ from before the foundation of the world; now being effectually called, he will allow no one to pluck me out of his almighty hand.

You proceed thus: "This is evident as to all those who believe themselves to be reprobate; all the great and precious promises are lost to them; they afford them no ray of comfort."

In answer to this, let me observe that none living, especially none who are desirous of

they are not of the number of God's elect. None but the unconverted, can have any just claim to it. And would dear Mr. Wesley give comfort, or dare you apply the precious promises of the children's bread, to men in a natural state, while they continue so? God forbid! What if the witness of the Spirit, and reprobation *does* put some upon doubting? So does that of regeneration. But, is not the witness of the Spirit means to put them upon searching and striving; and that striving, a good means to make the witness of election sure?

This is one reason among many others why I admire the doctrine of election and am convinced it should have a place in gospel ministrations and should be insisted on with faithfulness and candour, and a tendency to rouse the soul out of its carnal security. And therefore many carnal men cry out against it, and universal redemption is a notion sadly adapted to keep the soul in its lethargic sleepy condition. And many natural men admire and applaud it.

Your 13th, 14th and 15th paragraphs come next to be considered. "The witness of the Spirit, which is the experience shows to be much obstructed by this doctrine."

But, dear Sir, whose experience? Not your own; for in your journal, from your embarkment to your return to London, you seem to acknowledge that you have it not, and therefore you are silent on this matter. You must mean then the experience of others. For you say in the same paragraph "who have tasted of that good gift, who yet have soon lost it again," (I suppose you mean those who have again) "and fallen back into doubts and fears and darkness, even horrible darkness that is the witness of the Spirit." Now, as to the darkness of desertion, was not this the case of Jesus Christ himself, after the pouring of the unmeasurable unction of the Holy Ghost? Was not his soul exceeding sorrowful, even to the point of death? And was he not surrounded with an horrible darkness, even a darkness that might be felt? He cried out, "My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

And that all his followers are liable to the same, is it not evident from Scripture? For, "he was tempted in all things like as we are" (Heb 4:15) so that he himself might be able to succour them when tempted (Heb. 2:18). And is not their liableness thereunto consistent with that conformity to his members are to bear (Phil. 3:10)? Why then should persons falling into darkness, who have received the witness of the Spirit, be any argument against the doctrine of election?

"Yet," you say, "many, very many of those that hold it not, in all parts of the earth, have an uninterrupted witness of the Spirit, the continual light of God's countenance, from the first day they were believed, for many months or years, to this very day." But how does dear Mr. Wesley consult the experience of many, very many in all parts of the earth? Or could he be so

advanced without sufficient grounds, would it follow that their being kept in this light believing the doctrine of election? No, this [doctrine], according to the sentiments of o confirms and establishes a true Christian's faith of eternal salvation through Christ," and both sure and steadfast, when he walks in darkness and sees no light; as certainly he m received the witness of the Spirit, whatever you or others may unadvisedly assert to th

Then, to have respect to God's everlasting covenant, and to throw himself upon the fre that God who changeth not, will make him lift up the hands that hang down, and streng

But without the belief of the doctrine of election, and the immutability of the free love it is possible that any should have a comfortable assurance of eternal salvation. What o whose conscience is thoroughly awakened, and who is warned in good earnest to seek wrath to come, though he should be assured that all his past sins be forgiven, and that if notwithstanding this, he may hereafter become a child of the devil, and be cast into l assurance yield any solid, lasting comfort to a person convinced of the corruption and and of the malice, subtlety, and power of Satan? No! That which alone deserves the na faith is such an assurance as emboldens the believer, under the sense of his interest in o give the challenge to all his adversaries, whether men or devils, and that with regard to present, attempts to destroy—saying with the Apostle,

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. W condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love o tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or swo For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the sla these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am p neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things pres come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:33-39).

This, dear Sir, is the triumphant language of every soul that has attained a full assurance assurance can only arise from a belief of God's electing everlasting love. That many ha in Christ today, but take no thought for, or are not assured they shall be in him tomorro rather their imperfection and unhappiness than their privilege. I pray God to bring all s eternal love, that they may no longer build upon their own faithfulness, but on the unc whose gifts and callings are without repentance. For those whom God has once justifie

I observed before, dear Sir, it is not always a safe rule to judge of the truth of principle And therefore, supposing that all who hold *universal redemption* in your way of expla

faith, enjoyed the continual uninterrupted sight of God's countenance, it does not follow their principle. For that I am sure has a natural tendency to keep the soul in darkness for a creature thereby is taught that his being kept in a state of salvation is owing to his own strength; and a sandy foundation is that for a poor creature to build his hopes of perseverance upon? Every surprise by temptation, must throw him "into doubts and fears, into horrible darkness, which may be felt."

Hence it is that the letters which have been lately sent me by those who hold universal salvation, are lifeless, dry and inconsistent, in comparison of those I receive from persons on the contrary; who settle in the universal scheme, though they might begin in the Spirit, (whatever they may be) ending in the flesh, and building up a righteousness founded on their own free will: who have the hope of the glory of God, and build upon God's never-failing promise and unchangeable covenant; whose sensible presence is withdrawn from them.

But I would not judge of the truth of election by the experience of any particular person; (I am ashamed to see me in this foolishness of boasting) I think I myself might glory in election. For these few years I have received the witness of God's Spirit; since that, blessed be God, I have not doubted a quiet and saving interest in Jesus Christ: but with grief and humble shame I do acknowledge, I have not been since that. Though I do not—dare not—allow of any one transgression, yet hitherto I have not expected that while I am in this present world I ever shall be) able to live one day perfectly without sin. And since the Scriptures declare that there is not a just man upon earth (no, not one), and that the highest attainments in grace) that doeth good and sinneth not (Eccl. 7:20), we are sure that we are all of all the children of God.

The universal experience and acknowledgement of this among the godly in every age and country, will confute the error of those who hold in an absolute sense that after a man is born again he is perfect; and that he will never be tempted. Especially since the Holy Spirit condemns the persons who say they have no sin as deceiving themselves, being destitute of the truth, and as making God a liar (1 Jn. 1:8, 10). I have been also in the midst of manifold temptations, and expect to be often so before I die. Thus were the Apostles and the primitive Christians themselves. Thus was Luther, that man of God, who, as far as I can find, did not pervert the doctrine of election; and the great John Arndt was in the utmost perplexity, but a quarter of an hour before he died, he was no predestinarian.

And if I must speak freely, I believe your fighting so strenuously against the doctrine of election, and your vehemently for a sinless perfection are among the reasons or culpable causes, why you are so far from the liberties of the gospel, and from that full assurance of faith which they enjoy, who have the witness within them, and daily feed upon God's electing, everlasting love.

But perhaps you may say, that Luther and Arndt were no Christians, at least very weak Christians; and that I meanly of Abraham, though he was eminently called the friend of God: and, I believe, that he was so after God's own heart. No wonder, therefore, that in a letter you sent me not long since

no Baptist or Presbyterian writer whom you have read knew anything of the liberties of Bunyan, Henry, Flavel, Halyburton, nor any of the New England and Scots divines? So spiritedness and want of charity arise from your principles, and then do not cry out against an account of its being "destructive of meekness and love."

**Fourth**, I shall now proceed to another head. Says the dear Mr. Wesley, "How uncommon that thousands and millions of men, without any preceding offence or fault of theirs, were to everlasting burnings?"

But who ever asserted, that thousands and millions of men, *without any preceding offence* unchangeably doomed to everlasting burnings? Do not they who believe God's doom of everlasting burnings, also believe, that God looked upon them as men fallen in Adam? And that that the punishment first regarded the crime by which it was deserved? How then are they of a preceding fault? Surely Mr. Wesley will own God's justice in imputing Adam's sin to all after Adam fell, and his posterity in him, God might justly have passed them *all* by, without His Son to be a saviour for any one. Unless you heartily agree to both these points, you do not do aright. If you do own them, then you must acknowledge the doctrine of election and reprobation to be just and reasonable. For if God might justly impute Adam's sin to all, and afterwards have mercy on *some*, he might justly pass by *some*. Turn on the right hand, or on the left; you are reduced to an absurdity. And, if you would be consistent, you must either give up the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin, or the amiable doctrine of election, with a holy and righteous reprobation as its consequence. I believe it or not, the Word of God abides faithful: "The election hath obtained it, and the reprobation" (Rom. 11:7).

Your 17th paragraph, page 16, I pass over. What has been said on the 9th and 10th paragraphs, and the alteration, will answer it. I shall only say, it is the doctrine of election that most presses upon the heart of the elect. I am willing to suffer all things for the elect's sake. This makes me to preach with power. I know salvation does not depend on man's free will, but the Lord makes willing in the elect. He will make use of me to bring some of his elect home, when and where he pleases.

But, **Fifth**, you say, "This doctrine has a direct manifest tendency to overthrow the whole Christian revelation. For," say you, "supposing that eternal, unchangeable decree, one part of mankind must be damned, if Christian revelation were not in being."

But, dear Sir, how does that follow? Since it is only by the Christian revelation that we know of God's design of saving his church by the death of his Son. Yea, it is settled in the everlasting covenant that salvation shall be applied to the elect through the knowledge and faith of him. As the psalmist says, Ps. 53:11, "*By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.*" How then has the doctrine of election a direct tendency to overthrow the whole Christian revelation? Who ever thought that God's design of that seed-time and harvest should never cease, could afford an argument for the neglect of the elect? Or that the unchangeable purpose of God, that harvest should not fail, rendered the hear-

influence of the heavenly bodies unnecessary to produce it? No more does God's absolute choice preclude the necessity of the gospel revelation, or the use of any of the means determined the decree shall take effect. Nor will the right understanding, or the reverence ever allow or suffer a Christian in any case to separate the means from the end, or the

And since we are taught by the revelation itself that this was intended and given by God to call home his elect, we therefore receive it with joy, prize it highly, use it in faith, and extend it to all the world, in the full assurance, that wherever God sends it, sooner or later, it shall reach the elect within its call.

How then, in holding this doctrine, do we join with modern unbelievers in making the revelation unnecessary? No, dear Sir, you mistake. Infidels of all kinds are on *your* side of the question. Socinians arraign God's sovereignty and stand up for universal redemption. I pray God that your sermon, as it has grieved the hearts of many of God's children, may not also strengthen their most avowed enemies!

Here I could almost lie down and weep. "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph" (Ps. 58:8).

Further, you say, "This doctrine makes revelation contradict itself." For instance, say you interpret that text of Scripture, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated, as in the literal sense, hated Esau and all the reprobates from eternity!" And, when considered as they are, are they not objects of his hatred? And might not God, of his own good pleasure, love or save the elect—and yet at the same time do the reprobate no wrong? But you say, "God is love, unless he shows the same mercy to all?"

Again, says dear Mr. Wesley, "They infer from that text, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; and that he has mercy for those only, and not for the whole tenor of the Scripture, as is that express declaration in particular, 'The Lord is merciful and his mercy is over all his works.'"

And so it is, but not his *saving* mercy. God is loving to every man: he sends his rain upon the just and the unjust, and his sun to shine upon the good and the bad. But you say, "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). No! For every one, that believeth on Jesus, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him. "But he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mk. 16:16). For God is no respecter of persons, upon the account of any outward circumstance in life whatever; nor does the doctrine of election in the least suppose him to be a partial sovereign Lord of all, who is debtor to none, he has a right to do what he will with his favours to what objects he sees fit, merely at his pleasure. And his supreme right here is asserted in those passages of Scripture, where he says, "Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15, Exod. 33:11).

Further, from the text, "the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto the elder, 'All that the Father hath chosen hath he revealed unto me.' And the younger saith unto the elder, 'How canst thou say that, when thou knowest that thou art ignorant of the Father's mind? For he saith, 'Whom he will he revealeth unto me.' And thou knowest not what he saith, who revealeth unto thee the Father's secret?'" (Rom. 9:11-12)—you represent us as inferring that our way depends on the foreknowledge of God.

But who infers this, dear Sir? For if foreknowledge signifies approbation, as it does in the text, then we confess that predestination and election *do* depend on God's foreknowledge. But if by foreknowledge you understand God's fore-seeing some good works done by his creature, then the reason of choosing them and therefore electing them, then we say that in this sense predestination and election *do* depend on God's foreknowledge.

But I referred you, at the beginning of this letter, to Dr. Edwards's *Veritas Redux*, which I have also in a late letter, with Elisha Coles on *God's Sovereignty*. Be pleased to read these, and the sermons of Mr. Cooper of Boston in New England (which I also sent you) and I doubt not your objections answered. Though I would observe, that after all our reading on both sides, we shall never in this life be able to search out God's decrees to perfection. No, we must humbly confess we cannot comprehend, and with the great Apostle at the end of our enquiries cry out, "O the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" (Rom. 11:33-34) He was admiring God's sovereignty, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."

However, it may not be amiss to take notice, that if those texts, "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9) and "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11)—and such like—be taken literally, then no one will be damned.

But here's the distinction. God taketh no pleasure in the death of sinners, so as to delight in their destruction; but he delights to magnify his justice, by inflicting the punishment which their iniquities deserve. A righteous judge who takes no pleasure in condemning a criminal, may yet justly condemn him, that law and justice may be satisfied, even though it be in his power to procure him a pardon.

I would hint further, that you unjustly charge the doctrine of *reprobation* with blasphemy, when you say of *universal redemption*, as you set it forth, is really the highest reproach upon the dignity and merit of his blood. Consider whether it be not rather blasphemy to say as you do, "that God will save those that are saved, but also for those that perish."

The text you have misapplied to gloss over this, see explained by Ridgely, Edwards, and others. I omit answering your texts myself so that you may be brought to read such treatises, which will show you your error. You cannot make good the assertion that Christ died for them that perish (as Peter Bohler, one of the Moravian brethren, in order to make out universal redemption, confessed in a letter) that all the damned souls would hereafter be brought out of hell.

is thus minded. And yet unless this can be proved, universal redemption, taken in a literal sense, is impossible on the ground. For how can all be universally redeemed, if all are not finally saved?

Dear Sir, for Jesus Christ's sake, consider how you dishonour God by denying election. If salvation depend not on *God's free grace*, but on *man's free-will*. And if thus, it is more than probable that Christ would not have had the satisfaction of seeing the fruit of his death in the eternal life of his people. His preaching would then be vain, and all invitations for people to believe in him would all be in vain.

But, blessed be God, our Lord knew for whom he died. There was an eternal compact made between the Father and the Son. A certain number was then given him as the purchase and reward of his obedience. He prayed (Jn. 17:9), and *not for the world*. For these elect ones, and these only, he is now praying, and for their salvation he will be fully satisfied.

I purposely omit making any further particular remarks on the several last pages of your sermon, your name, dear Sir, been prefixed to the sermon, I could not have been so uncharitably treated by the author of such sophistry. You beg the question, in saying that God has declared, (notwithstanding that I suppose, some will be damned) that he will save all— *i.e.*, every individual person. You have no solid proof you have none) that God is unjust, if he passes by any, and then you exclaim "that is his decree": and yet, as I before hinted, in holding the doctrine of original sin, you profess that God has justly have passed by all.

Dear, dear Sir, O be not offended! For Christ's sake be not rash! Give yourself to reading the scriptures with grace. Down with your carnal reasoning. Be a little child; and then, instead of pawning your own reason, you have done in a late hymn book, if the doctrine of *universal redemption* be not true; instead of praising *perfection*, as you have done in the preface to that hymn book, and making man's salvation depend on *free will*, as you have in this sermon; you will compose a hymn in praise of sovereign grace, and will caution believers against striving to work a perfection out of their own hearts, and instead of the reverse of this, and entitle it "Free Grace *Indeed*." Free, not because free to all; but free to whom he will withhold or give it to whom and when he pleases.

Till you do this, I must doubt whether or not you know yourself. In the meanwhile, I cannot but censure the clergy of our church for not keeping to their articles, when you yourself positively deny the 9th, 10th and 17th.

Dear Sir, these things ought not so to be. God knows my heart, as I told you before, so that but a single regard to the honour of Christ has forced this letter from me. I love and honour you, when I come to judgment, will thank you before men and angels, for what you have, upon your own soul.

There, I am persuaded, I shall see dear Mr. Wesley convinced of election and everlasting life. I shall be glad to me with pleasure to think how I shall behold you casting your crown down at the feet of Christ.

were filled with a holy blushing for opposing the divine sovereignty in the manner you

But I hope the Lord will show you this before you go hence. O how do I long for that  
pleased to make use of this letter for that purpose, it would abundantly rejoice the heart  
Sir,

Yours affectionate, though unworthy brother and servant in Christ,

**GEORGE WHITEFIELD.**

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## **NOTE**

1. This refers to a work by Dr. John Edwards of Cambridge, not Jonathan Edwards, the famous American pastor-theologian.