

THE GOLDEN IDOL OF FREE-WILL

BY

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“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy Name, give glory for Thy mercy, and for Thy truths sake” (Psalms 115:1).

Some expositors have supposed, that this Psalm was penned by the prophet Daniel; on occasion of the miraculous deliverance of Shadrac, Meshac, and Abednego, when they came out, unhurt, from the burning fiery furnace, into which they had been thrown by the command of king Nebuchadnezzar.

And, indeed, there are not wanting passages, in the Psalm itself, which seem to countenance this conjecture. As where we read, at the fourth verse (speaking of the idols of the heathens, and, perhaps, with particular reference to that golden image which Nebuchadnezzar commanded to be worshiped), their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands: they have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they but they see not.

I dare say, that, in such an auditory as this, a number of Arminians *are* present. I fear, that all our public assemblies have too many of them. Perhaps, however, even these people, idolaters as they are, may be apt to blame, and, indeed, with justice, the absurdity of those who worship idols of silver and gold, the work of men's hands. But let me ask: If it be so very absurd, to worship the work of other men's hands; what must it be, to worship the works of our own hands? Perhaps, you may ask, God forbid that I should do so. Nevertheless, let me tell you, that trust, confidence, reliance, and dependence, for salvation, are all acts and very solemn ones too, of divine worship: and upon whatsoever you depend, whether in whole or in part, for your acceptance with God, and for your justification in His sight, whatsoever, you rely upon, and trust in, for the attainment of grace or glory; if it be any thing short of God in Christ, you are an idolater to all intents and purposes.

Very different is the idea which Scripture gives us, of the ever-blessed God, from that of those false gods worshiped by the heathens; and from that degrading representation of the true God, which Arminianism would palm upon mankind. *“Our God [says this Psalm, verse the third] is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased.”* This is not the Arminian idea of God: for our free-willers and our chance-mongers tell us, that God does not do whatsoever He pleases; that there are a great number of things, which God wishes to do, and tugs and strives to do, and yet cannot bring to pass: they tell

us, as one ingeniously expresses it:

*That all mankind He fain would save,
But longs for what He cannot have.
Industrious, thus, to sound abroad,
A disappointed, changing God.*

How does this comport with that majestic description, *Our God is in the heavens!* He sits upon the throne, weighing out, and dispensing, the fates of men; holding all events in His own hand; and guiding every link of every chain of second causes, from the beginning to the end of time. Our God is in heaven, possessed of all power; and (which is the natural consequence of that) He hath done whatsoever He pleased: or as the Apostle expresses it, (the words are different, but the sense is the same) “*He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.*” (Ephesians 1:11).

Therefore it is, that we both labour, and suffer reproach: even because we say (and the utmost we can say upon the subject, amounts to no more than this: to wit, that) our God is in heaven, and has done whatsoever pleased Him. And do according to His own sovereign pleasure He will, to the end of the chapter; though all the Arminians upon earth were to endeavor to defeat the divine intention, and to clog the wheels of divine government. He, that sits in heaven, laughs them to scorn: and brings His own purposes to pass, sometimes, even through the means of those very incidents, which evil men endeavor to throw in His way, with a mad view to disappoint Him of His purposes. “*All things,*” saith the Psalmist, “*serve Thee.*” (Psalms 119:91). They have, all, a direct tendency, either effectively or permissively, to carry on His unalterable designs of providence and grace. Observe: effectively, or permissively. For we never say, nor mean to say, that God is the worker of evil: we only maintain, that for reasons unknown to us, but well known to God, He is the efficacious permitter (not the agent, but the permitter) of whatsoever comes to pass. But when we talk of good, we then enlarge the term; and affirm, with the Psalmist, that all the help that is done upon earth, God does it Himself.

I remember a saying of the great Monsieur Du Moulin, in his admirable book, entitled *Anatome Arminianismi*. His observation is, that the wicked, no less than the elect, accomplish the wise and holy and just decrees of God: but, says he, with this difference; God's own people, after they are converted, endeavor to His will from a principle of love: whereas they who are left to

the perverseness of their own hearts (which is all the reprobation we contend for), who care not for God, nor is God in all their thoughts; these persons resemble men rowing in a boat, who make toward the very place on which they turn their backs. They turn their backs on the decree of God; and yet make to that very point, without knowing it.

One great contest, between the religion of Arminius, and the religion of Jesus Christ, is, who shall stand entitled to the praise and glory of a sinner's salvation? Conversion decides this point at once; for I think, that, without any imputation of uncharitableness, I may venture to say, that every truly awakened person, at least when he is under the shine of God's countenance upon his soul, will fall down upon his knees, with this hymn of praise ascending from his heart, "*Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but to Thy Name, give the glory: I am saved not for my righteousness, but for Thy mercy and Thy truth's sake.*"

And this holds true even as to the blessings of the life that now is. It is God that sets up one, and puts down another (see Psalms 75:7). Victory, for instance, when contending princes wage war, is all of God. "*The race is not to the swift, as swift; nor the battle to the strong.*" (Ecclesiastes 9:11), as such. It is the decree, the will, the power, the providence of God, which effectually, though sometimes invisibly, order and dispose of every event.

At the famous battle of Azincourt, in France, where, if I mistake not, 80,000 French were totally defeated by about 9,000 English, under the command of our immortal King Henry V., after the great business of the day was over, and God had given that renowned prince the victory, he ordered the foregoing Psalm (that is, the 114th), and part of this Psalm from whence I have read you the passage now under consideration, to be sung in the field of battle: by way of acknowledging, that all success, and all blessings, of what kind soever, come down from the Father of lights. Some of our historians acquaint us, that, when the triumphant English came to those words which I have taken for my text, the whole victorious army fell down upon their knees, as one man, in the field of conquest; and shouted, with one heart, and with one voice, "*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Thy Name, give the glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake.*"

And thus it will be when God has accomplished the number of His elect, and completely gathered in the fullness of His redeemed kingdom. What, do you

think, your song will be, when you come to heaven? Blessed be God, that He gave me free-will; and blessed be my own dear self, that made a good use of it? O no, no. Such a song as that was never heard in heaven yet, nor ever will, while God is God, and heaven is heaven. Look into the Book of Revelation, and there you will find the employ of the blessed, and the strains which they sing. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

“Thou art worthy, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God, by Thy Blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation”
(Revelation 9:10).