

S E R M O N XXXIII.

QUESTION VIII.

HOW doth GOD Execute His Decrees?

A N S W E R.

GOD Executeth his Decrees in the Works of Creation, and Providence.

WE have heard, That the Decrees of God relate to such things as come to pass in Time; in this Decree therefore we are to consider its Constitution, and its Execution: the former hath been taken notice of under the foregoing Question; the latter comprehends in it the whole Work of Efficiency; a Distribution of which our present Answer affords us; and gives us the occasion to look into the thing it self, whereof this Distribution is made, viz. God's Efficiency; of which take this Description:

IT is that whereby God worketh all things, & all in all things. What God fore-ordained in his Decree, that he brings to pass in his Works; these therefore are of an equal latitude. Efficiency signifies the thorough doing of a thing. Every Being or Thing is a Work of God, and claims Him for the doer of it.

1. CONCERNING the general Nature of Efficiency, take these Conclusions.

1. THE Efficient is a Cause from which the thing is. For he communicates his Vertue unto the Effect. As Christ once said, *Vertue is gone out from me*; so God, in all his Works, sends out Vertue from Himself, and communicates it to the Creature; so that all things are virtually in Him as their Efficient cause; as, Rom. 11. 36. *Of him, and thro' him, and to him are all things---*

2. THE Work of the Efficient is to Prepare the Matter, bring in the Form, and Finish the Thing; so making it fit for the attainment of its End. Thus we see in Artificial Works, as of the Carpenter in building an House; &c. And thus God doth Work Artificially in all the things that he doth.

3. EFFICIENCY is not an Immanent Act remaining in God, but Transient, falling upon an external Subject, and leaving an Impression or Change upon that. This Act leaves no Change in God; He is the same he was; it only adds a Relation to Him, which he bears to the Effect; the only Change is in the Subject, which by it passeth from Not-being, to Being; and so to such a Being.

II. AS to the special Nature of Efficiency, take these two things, in the Description.

1. IT is that whereby God Works All things. He Works all kinds of things, great and small; His Finger is in every thing; there is nothing done in the World, but he is the doer of it, Eph. 1. 11. --- *He worketh all things---* If we

look all over the World, and see any thing effected or made; any operation wrought, or thing brought to pass: we may say, as the Magicians once, *This is the Finger of God*. He had his hand in it, or it had never been done.

2. NOT only so, but he Works All in all things; 1 Cor. 12. 6. *It is the same God, which worketh all in all*. i. e. The whole Efficiency of all things Depends upon the First Cause; not only as to their Substantial Beings, but also as to the real Circumstances thereof, Isa. 45. 7. *I form the Light; and create Darkness: I make Peace, and create Evil; I the Lord do all these things*. All that concerns the Time, Place, Event, Success, &c. are ordered and wrought by Him; He himself drives the great and whole Trade of all the World; being the Cause of all Causes, and First mover of every thing that moves; Acts 17. 28. *In Him we live, move and have our being*.

NOW that God is such an Efficient is worth our proving; that so our Faith being settled upon it, may make suitable Improvement of so great and momentous a Truth: and this will appear if we consider,

1. THAT all Beings or Things are Inert, they can do nothing without the concurrence of His Power & Efficiency. If we speak of them, as *Not being*; (and once they were not) what can, what could the thing, (having no Existence, nor any remote principle of Essence,) contribute to its own Being, when it never thought of it self, nor was any thing; not having so much as a Material Cause, out of which it might be made? Or if we speak of the Creatures already Made, being now in Act; there is a first Mover and Cause of their Actions and Operations about themselves, without which they can do nothing: All Creatures are dead Cyphers, of no signification, except the Influence of God adds a Figure to them; if He moves them not, they ly dead, and cannot stir; they are as Pictures and Idols, that can let out no Efficacy, except he acts upon them. Sometimes the Sea flows not, and Sun shines not, the Fire doth not burn; and the Reason is, because he withdraws His Efficacy from them; they are all nothing and vanity; Isa. 40. 17. *All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity*.

2. IF we consider His Sovereign Acting and Ordering of every Motion of the Creature, and that whether Natural or Moral. Here mind two things:

(1.) HE can Interpose & Prevent the Motion of the Creature, when He Will. That he doth so, shews that he can; & we have Instances sufficient for it; See for this, Job 9. 7. *He commandeth the Sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the Stars*. Psal. 106. 9. *He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up*. Many such Acts as these have been done at the Exercise of the Faith of his People; divers whereof are mentioned in Heb. 11. particularly v. 33, 34.

(2.) THE Creatures, when they do act, are always at His Command. They do just what He bids them, and no more, or otherwise: *Pfal. 78. 26. He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by his power he brought in the south-wind, &c. He is therefore said to be the Father of all these Effects, Job 38. 28, 29. Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of the dew? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendred it? And they all are at his Word, and fulfill it, Ver. 31. Psal. 148. 8. And how can this be ascribed to Him, but in regard of His prevalent and predetermining Efficiency? He who doth this, must needs be acknowledged the First Mover.*

3. IF we take a particular Account of things, we shall discern that this Efficiency is in them all, and that their whole Dependence is upon it. And this will appear, both,

1. IN the Production of all things. Whatsoever is made, He made it. All things are the Workmanship of His Hands, Effects which he hath produced by the Word of his Power, *Gen. 1. 1. Isa. 40. 26. & 41. 4. He made us, and not we ourselves. If we were made, we had a Maker, and there was none could make the Creature but He; besides whom there was none, when the Creature was not. And,*

2. IN the Ordering or Management of the things that are produced by Him. In all the carrying on of the Affairs of the whole World, He is *All in All*; and his Hand is in every thing.

(1.) IN the very Smallest things that are. There is not so much as a *Sparrow falls to the ground*, but it is according as He disposeth it, it is not without Him; and the very *Hairs of our head are all numbred* by Him, *Matth. 10. 29, 30*. There is not a *Goard* grows, nor a *Worm* that eats it, but it is according as he Orders it; *Jonah 4. 6, 7. He hath an Hand in the very Birds building their Nests*, and disposeth thereof as he pleaseth, *Psal. 104. 17, 18.*

(2.) IN the Greatest things that are. As the Least are not beneath Him, so the Greatest are not above Him: All the high Wheels in the World are turned about by his Hand. All the translations of Kingdoms, desolations brought upon Dominions, and ruefull versions of Thrones, are the work of his Pleasure; He doth all this; *Jer. 27. 5, 6, 7. Dan. 4. 32. 1 Sam. 2. 5, 6. All the risings and fallings of great Men are done by Him; Isa. 40. 20, 23. Psal. 76. 12. He shall cut off the spirit of Princes, He is terrible to the Kings of the earth.*

(3.) IN the most Eventuous things that be. Things which seem to us to be most Casual, and to have no pre-disposal, He is the determining Agent in all these. We may instance in *Lots*; Men cast them, and there is a Contingency in them; as to any thing in second Causes, there is no Discretion of the Creature in the direction of them; yet are these wisely over-ruled by Him, and he makes them Decide matters just as he had before Purposed; *Prov. 16. 33. The Lot is cast into the lap, but*

the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. Thus the Lot fell upon *Achan*, upon *Saul*, &c. And this also is eminent in the Determination He puts upon things that are done without Counsel, to make them to fulfill his Counsel; thus in the Arrow that flew *Abab*, *1 Kings 23. 34. God is said to deliver a Man into his hand, that kills another accidentally, Exod. 21. 13.*

(4.) IN all the Evils that do befall the Children of Men: God challengeth this to himself, *Amos 3. 6. Shall there be Evil in the City, and the Lord hath not done it? And the things that are most Eventuous in themselves, yet they are Purposely and Deliberately done by God; and He Connected all the things which produce such an Event. If a Tile fall from a House, and slay a Man, God brought him thither in the instant. And indeed, if all these things are fore-appointed by God, as we before heard proved; then He hath an hand in the fulfilling of his Purpose; & this Job gives Him the free Acknowledgment of, in every thing that he met withal; Job 23. 14. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me.*

(5.) IN the disposing of the freest Actions of the freest Creatures, viz. Angels and Men. These are Causes by Counsel, of their own Actions; they have a free Will of their own, but yet He doth all here too. He preserves this Will of theirs, or else it could not exert it self at all; and He inclines it too, to be sure to all that is Good; there is never a good motion in it, but He put it in, *Psal. 119. 33, 34. Yea, He hath an hand also about Sin, though without Sin: He hardens the heart, and blinds the Mind; Exod. 14. 8. and Rom. 11. 8. God hath given them the Spirit of slumber, Eyes that they should not see. He useth them as Tools, or Instruments, to Work his Pleasure by, in the World, and makes their Wrath serve his Praise, &c. Psal. 76. 10. Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee---. They mean one thing, and He another; and whilst they pursue their own Designs, they only Accomplish His; Isa. 10. 6, 7. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit, he meaneth not so---. And if all these Works belong to God, then needs must Al-sufficiency belong to Him; He must be Acknowledged to Work all, and in all. And it is to be observed, that in all things, God keeps His Eye fixt upon His Decree: Efficiency is nothing else but His executing of that; it doth neither more, nor less, nor otherwise. He is said to do whatsoever he willed or pleased; which Will or Pleasure of His is not an occasional thing, as Men's Pleasures are: but it is Himself, from Eternity, Fixed, and Imutable; which is His Decree.*

NOW our Answer gives us a full, general Distribution of this Efficiency, giving us the two Heads, to which all that can be mentioned, as relating to it, must be reduced. All the External Works of God belong hither; God gives

gives a *Being* to all things that are; and having made them He *takes Care* of them, and *Provides* for them, *Orders* and *manageth* them to the Ends and Purposes they were made for. The Creature could not make it self; a meer Non-entity could not reduce it self into a Being, but must have remained Nothing for ever, if he had not given it Existence: and when it is made, it is as little able to Maintain its own Being; the same hand that produced it, must set a second hand to it, or else it will return again into Nothing; and under these two we shall find all the Works of God. A distinct inquiry into each of these will be afforded us in pursuance of the following Questions; which will afterwards come under our consideration.

U S E 1. HENCE, It is a safe and good way to root *Atheism* out of our hearts; and confirm us in the Belief that *there is a God*, to study much the *Doctrine of Efficiency*. The Apostle tells us, That the *Invisible God*, is *seen and known by visible things*, i. e. Acts of Creation and Providence, Rom. 1. 19, 20. And the Psalmist read the Declaration of His God-head in His Works, Psal. 86. 10. *For thou art great and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone*. There are glorious, mighty and powerful Works wrought which claim no less Wisdom and Power than that of a God to bring them about. The Production of a World, so framed and made; so great, so many, and so curious Beings produced, and all out of Nothing; the great Revolutions and Changes in the World, the wonderful secret movings of those great Wheels; the Concurrence of all things to the bringing about Eternal Projects: Did but the Atheist read these things over in his mind, and well consider of them, he must say, the Finger of God, (not Nature, nor Chance, but the God of Nature,) is in all these things; and the hearts of Christians would be greatly settled against all the Temptations to doubt of the Being of God by this Consideration.

U S E 2. HENCE *There is much of God to be seen in all the Works* which we daily see done in the World. Something of God appears in all; there is no Work which He is not in, no Action which he Orders not; and that, not as a bare Spectator or Supervisor, but an Agent in all. We see and hear of many wonderful Providences, strange Changes that are brought about, stupendous Effects which non-plus our Understandings in the enquiry after the Causes of them: Now, who, or whatever be the Instrument, He is the Efficient; and this is to be observed in every Passage, whether of Kindness shewn us, or Injury done to us, it is the Lord, he bids *Simeon* to

Curse *David*; and this may teach us to Adore and Worship Him in all, and to sit down quieted under whatsoever befalls us, saying with him, Psal. 39. 9. *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it*.

U S E 3. LEARN hence, That it is the *Christians Duty* to dwell much on the Contemplation of the *Efficiency of God*. Psal. 66. 5. *Come and see the works of God*. Psal. 77. 11, 12. *I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate of all thy works*. God's Works help his People to Work, in the reviewing of them: And this will serve both to keep the Mind in a Spiritual frame, admiring at the Glory of God, declared in His Works; and to help them to carry it reverently, and fearfully before Him, keeping up an high esteem of Him in their hearts: (All low and mean thoughts of God, proceeding from a want of considering his Works,) and keeping their Souls humble, when by discovering His Infinite Greatness, in the great things that he hath done, they are effectually convinced of their own Littleness, yea Nothingness; that humbled *Job*, Chap. 38. with 40. 41. & 42. 5, 6.

U S E 4. HENCE *God is to be sought to, to work all our works in us, and for us*: We, alas! can do nothing of our selves; and yet we have great Duties lying upon us, but are without Strength; our Operations depend upon him; Phil. 2. 13. *It is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure*. Joh. 15. 5. -- *Without me, ye can do nothing*. He must set our Wheels on going, else they stand still.

U S E 5. HERE is the Reason, why the *Saints shall never fail in their Works*; because they have an *Interest in, and Assistance from Him, who works all things according to the Counsel of His Will*. Christ, who is *all, and in all*, dwells in them and helps them; the Spirit, who is *God*, hath made them his Temple; how then shall they fail

U S E 6. LET this then encourage *Faith in God, for the accomplishment of every Promise*, and direct us to give to God the acknowledgment of all the Performances of them. When God would establish His People's Faith, He leads them hither, Isa. 45. 11, 12. *Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, ask me of things to come, concerning my sons; I have made the Earth, and Created Man upon it, &c.* And when Paul would draw us to give God all Praise he points us to this, Rom. 11. 36. *For of him, and thro' him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.*

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