

You cannot go to either extreme. Yet there is a sense in which each of them is right. This is brought out very wonderfully in this first ch. -- in the third -- the first part of the third chapter of the Confession of Faith. Where it says that God did by a most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass.

If you stop there and leave off the word God at the beginning you have nothing but misery and despair. That's the common philosophic view of the day. They leave out the word God. And say that man is simply under the control of circumstances. Yet we do believe the Bible teaches that God did from all eternity forordain everything. It was a good God, a loving God, a righteous God who did it.

He has ordained all things that come to pass. But as the confession goes on. "So as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence done to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty nor contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

A view that is somewhat in between these two was the prevailing view among the common people of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. It is the view from which Luther and Calvin so violently reacted. It is a view which is so very definitely wrong.

According to that view man is here upon the earth. He has a choice between doing what is right and doing what is wrong. But if he does what is wrong, he can do some sort of a magical ceremony, some kind of a magical performance to get himself relieved from it. He can pay for his sin, and God is going to hold a balance sheet. God is going to look at each one of us and say, How good were you? How much was made up for each of your sins?

They tell the story of a man in the Middle Ages who was in a boat. The boat was some distance from shore and it had sprung a leak. The man cried out, Oh St. _____ if you'll bring us to shore, I'll give you a silver candlestick. I'll put a silver candlestick in your church. Do bring us safely to shore he said. Someone said to him, You have not got the money to pay for a silver candlestick like that! And the man whispered, Oh, I don't think St. _____ knows that!

That I fear ----- that God is having a balance sheet upon us and we can pay for our sins. That is the very opposite of Pauline theology. The very opposite of Reformed teaching. The very opposite of Calvinism which says we are saved purely by the grace of God. That it is not by anything we have done. It is not by any good works of ourselves. That looked at dispassionately any one of us whom God has saved may be much worse than some other ones.

But God in his marvellous mercy has chosen to come down to our sin, to come down to our wickedness and to save us from our sin.