

Scriptures Repeatedly Quoted by John Knox on God's Absolute Sovereignty and Double Predestination

Psalm 115:3: "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

Psalm 135:6: "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places."

Proverbs 16:4: "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."

Isaiah 45:7: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things."

Matthew 11:25: "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

John 17:9: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine."

Romans 9:13: "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

Romans 9:16: "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

Romans 9:18: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Romans 9:21-23: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?"

II Corinthians 2:15-16: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?"

Ephesians 1:11: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

John Knox on the Four Main Texts Cited in Support of a Failed Desire of God to Save Everybody

(from *On Predestination, in Answer to the Cavillations by an Anabaptist* [1560],
with spelling and punctuation modernized)

(1)

Matthew 23:37: “[According to Knox’s Anabaptist adversary] Christ, as he witnesseth himself, would have gathered the Jerusalemites together, as the hen her chickens, yet would they not [misquoting *Matthew 23:37*]. God would that the Israelites should enter into the land of Canaan, and they would not ... [According to Knox] Because the Scriptures, which you heap together, be either plainly repugnant to your error, or else make nothing for probation of the same, I will so shortly as I can go through them, only noting wherein you abuse the words and mind of the Holy Ghost. The words of our Master, spoken in the 23rd chapter of *Matthew’s Gospel*, serve nothing for your purposes ... If you dare say, that Christ in that place meaneth, in that he would have gathered those murderers, and sons of murderers, as he doth witness he doth gather his chosen flock, himself will convict you of a lie. For he affirmeth the same to the Scribes and Pharisees, to whom principally he spake in that place, that they were not of his sheep [*John 10:26*], and that therefore they could not be gathered to his fold; that they were not of God, and therefore that they could not hear his voice [*John 8:47*]; that he did not pray for the world [*John 17:9*], and therefore they could never be united to God. You must declare how that God would that those Israelites, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, should enter into the land promised. If you say, by any other will than by his general principle given, that they should go and possess it, you shall lack the testimony of the Holy Ghost. I have declared causes most just and most sufficient, why God shall command that which is just, right, and laudable, albeit that man neither can perform his commandments, neither yet that it was God’s eternal will and counsel that all men should so do. And further, I have declared just causes why God doth call many to repentance and felicity, and yet that he chooseth a certain to attain thereto, and enter the same. And so, I say, you must prove that God did otherwise will them to enter into the land than by his general commandment, before you be able to prove that any thing is done against the eternal and immutable will of God” (pp. 320, 327-328; cf. 164-165).

(2)

I Timothy 2:4: “Further, if God willeth all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth [*I Tim. 2:4*], and yet many do perish in ignorance, and shall be condemned as Christ Jesus doth pronounce: then must it either follow, that God’s will is mutable, and so be unconstant, and not at all times like to himself, or else that he is not omnipotent ... The Apostle in these words: ‘God willeth all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth,’ speaketh not of every man, and of every particular person, but of all men in general, that is to say, of men of all estates, all conditions, all realms, and all ages. For as in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither man nor woman, free man nor servant, but all are one in him [*Gal. 3:28*], so can no estate, no condition of man, no realm, nor no age, be proved so wicked and so corrupt, but out of the like hath God called some to the participation of his light, and to salvation and life by Christ Jesus; and that this is the very natural meaning of the Holy Ghost, the text itself doth witness. For the Apostle immediately before willeth prayers and supplications to be made for all men, for kings, and for all that were placed in authority. And because that the Church was chiefly oppressed by such, these doubts might have risen: Are we then bound to pray for those that are express and conjured enemies against God! ‘You are (saith the Apostle) for that is good and acceptable before God our Saviour, who will all men to be saved:’ that is, God willeth you to pray for your persecutors, that their eyes may be opened, and they be converted to the living God; who, no doubt, will save some of all estates, of all conditions and vocations of men ... If this interpretation (which we doubt not to be the very meaning of the Holy Ghost) can not satisfy you, then will I ask of you, If God will men otherwise to be saved than by Christ Jesus? or, as the Apostle speaketh, by coming to the knowledge of the verity? Plain it

is, that by the words of the Apostle you can conclude none otherwise. For as he saith, 'God will all men to be saved;' so doth he add, 'and willeth all men to come to the knowledge of the verity.' Which word 'willeth,' albeit it be not expressly repeated in the second member, yet of necessity it must be understood as those that be but meanly seen in the Greek or Latin tongue do evidently see. Then, if I shall sufficiently prove, that God willeth not all men to come to the knowledge of the verity, in such sort as the Apostle meaneth, shall it not infallibly follow, that God will not all men to be saved, in such sense as you understand. That God willeth not all men to come to the knowledge of that verity, by the which man is verily made free from the bondage of Satan, is evident, not only by those whom we do see walk in darkness and ignorance, but also by the manifest Scriptures of God, who called Abraham, making to him and to his seed, the promise of salvation, saying, 'I will be thy God, and the God of thy seed after thee,' which promise he kept secret many ages from the rest of the world. When he did notify his law unto Israel, and when Moses did repeat the same, he said, 'Behold, I have laid before you this day life and death, benediction and execration; chose therefore life, that thou and thy seed may live' [Deut. 30:19]. If God would that all men and all nations indifferently should come to the same knowledge, why were not the laws, statutes, and judgments of God made manifest to others, as they were to Israel? And if you answer that so they were, the Holy Ghost shall convict you of a lie. For he affirmeth, that God had not done so to all nations, and that his judgments he had not revealed nor made known unto them [Ps. 147:19-20]. But if that plain division made by God himself betwixt Jew and Gentile, during the time of the law, doth not fully satisfy you, hear yet the sentence of our Master Christ Jesus, who saith to his disciples, 'To you it is given to understand the secrets of the kingdom, but unto others in parables, that having eyes they should not see' [Mark 4:11-12]. And that most plainly in that his solemn thanksgiving, he saith, 'I praise thee, O Father, for thou hast hid these things from the prudent, and from the wise, but thou hast revealed them to little ones' [Matt. 11:25]. If God would have had the true knowledge of himself, and of his Son Christ Jesus, common to all why should Christ himself affirm, 'That to some it was given, and to others it was not given; to some it was revealed, and from others it was hid!' And therefore, seeing it is plain that God will not give his true knowledge to all (yea, to some he doth never offer it), you shall never be able to prove, that God will all men to be saved. For the only means to attain to salvation and to life, is to know and embrace God to be our merciful Father in Christ Jesus, to which knowledge whosoever doth not attain (I mean of those that come to the years and age of discretion) can have no assurance to be saved. This were sufficient to convict you, even in your own conscience. For albeit malice will not suffer you to give place to the plain verity, yet shall the weight thereof so oppress your pride, that when you do open your mouth against it, yet shall you be witnesses even against yourselves" (pp. 406-407, 410-412).

(3)

Ezekiel 33:11: "But here you say, that God will the death of no creature [Eze. 33:11], but that he will all men to be saved [I Tim. 2:4]; which last words being understand as you do urge them, must destroy the former nature of God, and take away his justice. For if he absolutely will the death of no creature, then will he no punishment to follow sin. And if he will no punishment, then willeth he his justice to cease, and so, consequently, must one of the properties of his godly nature cease. Study for an answer, to make your former words and latter words better agree, or else you will be compelled to confess, that God, for some respect, willeth both death and damnation to come upon some creatures ... Now it resteth to declare how violently you wrest the words of the Prophet and of the Apostle. The Prophet, speaking in the person of God, saith, 'I will not the death of a sinner, but rather that he convert, and live.' And the Apostle affirmeth, that God will all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Hereupon you conclude, God will the death of no creature: this is your first violence which you do to the text. For the Prophet saith not, 'I will the death of no creature,' but saith, 'I will not the death of a sinner.' You are not ignorant, I suppose, what difference there is betwixt a universal negative and an indefinite, or particular. Where you say, God willeth the death of no creature, you speak generally and universally, excepting none. But so doth not the Prophet, for he saith not, 'I will the death of no creature,' neither yet 'I will the death of no sinner,' but simply saith, 'I will not the death of a sinner.' I wonder that you consider not that as there is difference betwixt creatures and creature, so that also there is difference betwixt sinners and sinner. Some creatures are appointed to death, for the use and sustentation of man. And dare you say, that this is done

against God's will! We be taught the contrary by his own mouth. If you correcting your generality, shall say, that you mean only that God will the death of no man. And I fear not yet to join with you, and against you to affirm, that God hath willed, doth will, and shall will the death of some men. The Holy Ghost, speaking of the sons of Eli the high priest saith, 'But they did not hear the voice of their father, because the Lord would kill them' [I Sam. 2:25]. And Moses saith, 'Sihon king of Heshbon would not suffer us to pass through his country for the Lord thy God did harden his mind, and strengthen his heart, that he should give him into thy hands' [Deut. 2:30]. How often doth Moses and Joshua declare unto the people, that God would kill, root out, and destroy, those wicked nations from before the face of his people! And were all those kings, whom Joshua did kill, killed against God's will! The Holy Ghost affirmeth the contrary. For it is written, 'the Lord did trouble them before Israel, and he did strike them with a great slaughter. And while that they did flee before the Israelites, and were in the descent of Beth-horon, the Lord cast down upon them from heaven great stones; and many more perished by the hail stones that were slain with the sword of the children of Israel' [Josh. 10:10-11]. If the destruction, slaughter, and death, of these wicked men, and of the great host of Sennacherib, was not the will of God, I can not tell how man shall be assured of his will. For the plain word did before promise, that the Lord should destroy them; and the fact doth witness the constancy and performance of his will. And the same thing doth God this day, and shall do to the end of the world, when he shall adjudge the reprobate (as before is said) to the death perpetual; and that not against his will, but willingly, for the manifestation of his just judgments, and declaration of his own glory [Rom. 9:22-23]. And therefore, I say, that your proposition, saying, 'God willeth the death of no creature,' is manifestly false, as it that repugneth to God's justice and to his evident Scriptures. The minds of the Prophets was to stir such as had declined from God, to return unto him by true repentance. And because their iniquities were so many, and offences so great, that justly they might have despaired of remission, mercy, and grace, therefore doth the Prophet, for the better assurance of those that should repent, affirm. 'That God delighteth not, neither willeth the death of the wicked,' but of which wicked? Of him, no doubt, that truly should repent, in his death did not, nor never shall God delight. But he delighteth to be known a God that sheweth mercy, grace, and favour to such as unfeignedly call for the same, how grievous soever their former offences have been. But such as continue obstinate in their impiety, have no portion of these promises. For them will God kill, them will he destroy, and them will he thrust, by the power of his Word, into the fire which never shall be quenched" (pp. 406, 408-410).

(4)

II Peter 3:9: "The Apostle Saint Peter saith, 'The Lord that hath promised is not slow, but he is long suffering towards us, while that he will none to perish, but will receive all to repentance' [II Peter 3:9]. The Apostle here meaneth not that all, without exception, shall be received to life by true repentance, but that the cause why God so long deferreth (as it were) the extreme judgment, is, that the elect number of God's children may be complete (as answer was given to those that cried under the altar, to be revenged of the tyrannies that dwell on the earth [Rev. 6:9-11]) of these his elect children God will none to perish, as before is said. But there is another sort of sinner, far different from these. For neither are they displeased with themselves, neither yet hate they iniquity, but against God's express commandments furiously they run, with Cain to murder the innocent, with Pharaoh to oppress the people of God, with Judas to betray the known and professed verity; and, finally so delight they in all filthiness and impiety, that they can not repent. The eyes of such be blinded, their hearts are hardened, they are given over into a reprobate mind. And for them doth not Christ Jesus pray [John 17:9], and therefore they can do nothing but headlong run from evil to worse, as the Devil (to whose tyranny they are committed) doth drive them, till finally they come to perdition; which end was appointed unto them, not against God's will, but by his will immutable in his eternal counsel. For no loss will he that the severity of his judgments be seen in the vessels of wrath, than that the riches of his grace be praised in the vessels of mercy [Rom. 9:22-23]. Storm and rage, spew forth your venom and blaspheme, till you provoke God's vengeance at once to be poured forth upon your own heads; this sentence will be never retracted. He will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he maketh hard-hearted [Rom. 9:18]. That God in himself hath but one will, which is holy, just, and permanent, that in him there is no contrariness; that he is faithful, and doth perform whatsoever he doth promise" (pp. 417-418; cf. 360).