

God's Sovereignty over the Good and over the Wicked¹

Joel 2:11

He afterwards adds in the last place, *For great will be the day of Jehovah and terrible, and who will endure it?* In this clause he shows that the vengeance would be such as would reduce the Jews to nothing, and that it was now time to repent, and that if they still turned a deaf ear to what the Prophet denounces, God would punish their perverseness.

Now with regard to what he says, that *strong* is he who does the word of God, we have elsewhere reminded you that **men serve God in two ways, —**

**(1) they either execute his commands willingly, or
(2) [they] are led to do so by a blind impulse.**

#1. The angels and the faithful perform God's commands, because they are guided by the spirit of obedience;

#2. But the wicked also, and the devil who is their head, fulfill God's biddings; this, however, is not to be imputed to them as obedience, for they are only led by their own wicked purposes, and seek to destroy, as far as they can, the whole government of God; but they are constrained, willing or unwilling, to obey God, not of their own accord or willingly, as I have said, but the Lord turns all their efforts to answer the end which he has decreed. Whatever, then, Satan and the wicked attempt to do, they at the same time serve God and obey his commands; and though they rage against God, he yet holds them in by his bridle, and also so guides their attempts and their purposes as to answer his own ends. In this sense, then, it is, that Joel says, that the Assyrians would do the word of God; not that it was their purpose to obey God, not that God had commanded them anything, but he puts the word of the Lord here for his secret purpose.

As, then, the wicked perform no voluntary obedience to God, but constrained, when they execute God's commands; so **there is a twofold command or word of God:**

#1. There is the command by which He teaches His own children and leads them to obey Him; and

#2. There is another, a hidden command, when he deigns not to address men, and shows not what pleases him or what he means to do, but suffers them to be led by their own sinful desires; in the meantime, he has his own secret purpose, which by them he executes though without their intention.

¹ From John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Twelve Minor Prophets*, Vol. II, trans. Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 54-55.