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GOD'S KINDNESS AND GRACE IN ELECTION

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"All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me." John vi, 37.

THE gospel of the blessed God is conveyed to us in this scripture: yet one part of it is what the natural man hates most bitterly, whenever presented to his view. That great, that wonderful, most merciful doctrine of the free, eternal election of some persons to life, we have here. It seems at once to challenge men who have a perverted sense of divine justice and goodness, to combat it; for to fallen man's understanding, will, and conception of things nothing is straight concerning God and His truth. It is a mercy to be kept from turning our faces from the bare truth of what God has done in allotting some to eternal life and some to everlasting destruction. It is a great mercy not to be left to our blindness and enmity to so solemn, so awful a doctrine of the sacred Scriptures as that of the free, personal election of some to eternal life. It is God's right to do what He will with His own. Whoever interferes with His works, His Word, and His power as to this right of election, is a traitor to Him, a sinner with whom He will deal one day. We must not interfere with Him in His inalienable prerogative. "Hath not the Potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Ro. ix. 21). This awful truth should be dealt with tenderly, soberly, and in the fear of His holy name. That it stirs the minds of some to great rage there can be no doubt. Of this I am convinced, that there is no merciful doctrine existing, if this of election be not merciful. The power of it how wonderful, the pity how omnipotent, the grace how marvellous! It says of multitudes, "They shall not destroy themselves." As for others, they are God's enemies; and as such He will deal with them — on the ground not of the ejection of *some* and passing *them* by, but that they are sinners, have broken His law, and are His enemies. They say in every act of their hearts, if not with their lips, "We will not have this Man to reign over us." That will be the cause of their condemnation; it is that will make their hell the second death, and light the fire of justice in them for ever. This doctrine affects all mankind, and blessedly affects some. "The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (Ro. xi. 7; 2 Co. iv. 3, 4). The state is fixed of all who are ordained to eternal life, their surroundings are fixed, and the moment when the radical change, the new birth, shall take place in them.

First, I would speak of election *as an act of God the Father's*, as in this scripture: "All that the Father giveth Me." We may speak of His acts as of two kinds, *external* and *internal*. The external are known as executed in their appointed times; and all arise from the internal. Among them are the creation of the world and His providential dealings. These are visible to all, being constantly maintained or carried on. There is in providence an external working of divine power, a mighty energy. Very solemn are some of His works in providence. "Which of you," said Christ with this sovereignty before Him, "by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" (Mat. vi. 27). "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall

not fall on the ground without your Father" (x. 29, 30). Here God's working in providence is set forth as mighty, ruling, and overruling power.

And there are *internal* acts of Jehovah, which are all eternal. The making of the world is from an internal act of His will. One of these internal acts, and that on which all others depend, is the election of Christ from eternity to be the "First born of every creature," "the Beginning of the creation of God." When God would create the worlds and all creatures, He first set up His Son to be the Man Christ, the "Brightness of His glory and the express Image of His Person," decreeing that He should in due time take upon Him the nature of man, and that all things should be created by Him and for Him as their Lord and Heir (Col. i. 15, 16; Re. iii. 14; He. i. 2). He calls Him, "Mine Elect;" "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine Elect, in Whom My soul delighteth." Another internal act of God the Father is the election of some out of the rest of His creatures to be a church for His Christ. He gave them to Him, and blessed them in Him; the sight of which by faith leads us to exclaim with Paul: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Ep. i. 3, 4).

Here is divine sovereignty in the eternal movements of it, in which as they come forth God is and will be glorified. While the world lasts this doctrine will last; and there will be a church, though at times few may compose it. What a mercy to belong to it! This is the great thing the Spirit reveals in the Scriptures, – God taking certain pieces of clay from the whole human mass, in Adam, and saying in sovereign love, "These shall be one with Christ. These shall be vessels of mercy." Upon them God – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, will pour out of His great fullness of love and glory. For all shall be filled none are to be empty vessels. They are all "to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," that they may be "filled with all the fullness of God," and be "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ep. iii. 19; i. 23).

One plain Scripture evidence of the doctrine of election is the setting up of the nation of Israel to be a peculiar people to Himself, De. vii. 6, &c. This in Scripture is made a type of the setting apart of His elect people in Christ, to be for Him. As Moses says of literal Israel, "The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance;" so Paul prays that the saints may know what are "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (De. xxxii. 9; Ep. i. 18). Then let us not seek to resist this great decree of God, or rebel against it, or lie down in a carnal acquiescence in it, but seek to be subjects of it. I said it was a most merciful doctrine. For there is not a man willing of himself to beg for mercy without bringing a penny. Man being a fallen creature, there is a necessity that a supreme Power, an omnipotent Will, should turn his will in another direction than that given to it by the fall, if ever he is saved. If any fallen son of Adam is to escape the just reward of his deeds, he must be delivered by a power overcoming him stronger than he. Who that is born again can say, "I was first in the choice"? Then if all alike would have ruined themselves inevitably, is not that doctrine most marvellously merciful that stepped in, and said to this and that one, "Hitherto, lustful soul, shalt thou go, and no farther"? "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning" (Ps. cx. 3). And says Christ, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me." "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me."

By this sovereign act of God men are taken from their own standing in their first head by creation, and given to Another. God views them as they stand in Christ, "complete in Him," as when they were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Every living soul says

in his heart, "O that I may be found there!" Look at the power that keeps all His saints: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one" (Jn. x. 27-30). The blessedness, the tenderness of this doctrine of election, by which some are put by the Father into the hands of Christ, that He may be their Keeper, Husband, Redeemer, Friend, and Brother born for adversity, is wonderful and good beyond expression.

Second. Let us look at *the effect of a proper knowledge of this doctrine, of a believing reception of it into our hearts*. A carnal, sleepy, natural, acquiescence in it will do us no good; but a perception of it as that which alone steps in between a sinner and hell, and has in it alone salvation and every blessedness, will have a good effect.

One effect of knowing this doctrine will be *to stir up the person to make his calling and election sure*. A spiritual perception of the greatness and blessedness of it will lead one to pray, "Lord, didst Thou choose me? Thou hast elected some; didst Thou elect me?" If it effects any thus, the best advice is, "Press the case." God is never displeased with any who come to Him about those things which belong to Himself. It is not, then, a secret doctrine; it is not to be spoken of as secret, but as God's holy truth. If anything is plain in Scripture, it is this. He may use one truth or another to awaken and quicken the soul to a sense of its lost condition before Him. The sight of our sins and our sinful nature will make one tremble. O it is solemn when a man comes to feel he is like a bit of tow in the fire in the hands of his sinfulness, so easily is he overcome! He might pursue a thought till he died, yet could never overtake and overcome it. What can break these chains, these cords of sin, and deliver his soul? Nothing but the blood of Christ, which was "shed for many, for the remission of sins." But this may be the question working in his heart: "Am I one for whom it was shed? Has God chosen me?" It is a mighty concern to us to know we are included in this gift: "All that the Father giveth Me;" that He has said to His Son of us individually, "Take this person for Me and for Thyself, be responsible for him, and bring him to Me and to Thyself, that he may be without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, and dwell with Us for ever."

Another effect of knowing this doctrine will be this – *to deeply humble and abase proud nature*. Can we not assist in any way in this great matter of salvation? May we not share in the least in the honour and glory of the work? We read, "They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of, Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour unto them" (Ps. xlv. 3). What but His eternal favour has made heaven so sure to His people that not all sin's power, hell's curse, shall consign one to perdition, but all shall be everlastingly delivered? What a mercy that the Father has fixed it and ordained it! – He who said of Saul of Tarsus "He is a chosen vessel unto Me," who appeared to him in the way, as he was bent upon destroying the saints, and so overcame his heart, that in a few days he preached that Jesus whom he would have destroyed. He can appear to the most obdurate sinner now, to soften and break down the proud, rebellious spirit, and to give a praying spirit; according to His word: "Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the Most High: therefore He brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses" (Ps. cvii 10-13). "THEY SHALL COME TO ME" – this is what Christ says concerning all those that are given to Him.

To seek Him is to come to Him. Is there a coming sinner who cannot keep from the throne of grace, but the cry wells up in him, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" "Lord, save, or I perish!" "Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great"? Some must own their hearts bend in the right direction, beat towards Jesus, the Friend of sinners, whom God hath set forth to be a Propitiation. Then this scripture stands on their side: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me." They come because they are of those given to Christ; they have their wills and affections bent towards Him.

Then, without toning down election, see what kindness is in it. It needs no toning down; but let us take it in its native, eternal glory. When the question was put to Christ whether there were few that be saved, He answered by the gracious command "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which; go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Lu. xiii. 24; Mat. vii. 13, 14). That straitness and fewness are given as the reason men should strive to enter in, and make their calling and election sure. Their election is known by their coming; everyone chosen to salvation must be among the comers to Christ. This doctrine is high, great, glorious, wonderful. It has never been, nor will be, really a bar to any coming sinner. It may be a source of trial; but it is never by the Holy Ghost put in the way of a coming sinner as a bar.

O the kiss of mercy, the embrace of love, which awaits all coming sinners! May He make over to us His wonderful gospel in this word: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me;" and we shall at length find ourselves His children, pardoned, adopted sons and daughters, at the feet of Jesus, washed in His blood, and clothed in His righteousness.