

## THE ELECTION OF THE BRETHREN.

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"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."—I THESS. i. 4.

You need not, my dear friends, presume that I have read this text this afternoon because I am in a particularly triumphing state in my own soul's experience. You need have no fear, I think, if you are among the weak and the poor, the needy and the self-aborrent, that I shall be flying over your heads in my testimony; although the language of my text seems very firm, substantial, and unwavering in its nature.

The Apostle does not say, Let us talk about election, let us speculate about it, let us argue upon the point, let us see how many scriptures we can collate together to prove it is a truth of the Gospel; but he says, "Brethren beloved, we know we are elected of God." That is better than speculation, or mere argument. But we are met at once with this objection—Supposing we do not know it? Supposing we are in the dark about it? Supposing we say sometimes, If that point could be really settled we think we should have all we desire; but we seem very far from it; sometimes there is a little hope springing up in the soul that the Lord has done something for us, has begun at least to draw us from the world, to make sin hateful and abhorrent to us and to make His Son Jesus Christ the one thing desirable in our estimation; but we cannot get beyond that; and for us to say we know our personal election of God would be to belie our own feelings and to reach or stretch ourselves entirely beyond our measure. I am not going to tempt you to do it: I would not persuade you into a profession of the election of God's grace; that would be of no use to you if I did. Supposing I could with the tongue of suasion to-day, so operate upon your natural feelings or augmentative mind as to send you home with a sort of gladness in your heart upon the point, where would it be when the next blast of temptation blew upon your spirit? or supposing it carried you along with a kind of creature joy right through the journey—when the sweat of death appeared upon your brow, how far would it stand in view of an eternal world?

We are still feeling the necessity of praying personally:—

"Let no false comfort lift us up  
To confidence that's vain;"

and yet we would pray, with the poet:—

"Nor let our faith and courage droop,  
For whom the Lamb was slain."

It will be a very great mercy for you if you are not offended with the doctrine I am about to proclaim. We live in the last days, perilous times. And among the evidences of that perilous time that was to come according to divine prophecy was this one: "That men will not endure sound doctrine: but will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Timothy iv. 3). I think the evidences seem very much like a fulfilment of that prophecy in the day in which we live. How studiously men avoid this subject, the Election of God! How it stirs up the prejudice of the human mind if we begin to speak about Divine Sovereignty or the absolute workings of Jehovah's own immutable will and independence of creature power and creature strength! Have you been favoured to enter a little into the poet's conclusion and decision on this point:—

"Election! 'tis a truth divine;  
For, Lord, I plainly see,  
Had not Thy choice prevented mine,  
I ne'er had chosen Thee"?

If you have got as far as that by the Spirit's teaching you will not be offended at the doctrine. Because, you see, it will be something to you more than an objective doctrine—something to look at at a distance and speculate upon; it will be to you one of God's wells of salvation which He has kindly put in the wilderness way; and when you come to it and draw a little of the pure stream of infinite love there is in it—for that is the ocean from whence it all springs, God's own love—you will say, "It is so sweet, so suitable to such a wretch as I; oh, I feel if my hope was not built on it, God's own eternal election according to His own sovereign goodwill and pleasure, I should have no hope whatever; nothing else is of any avail for such as I feel myself to be."

If you know and carry that witness about with you day by day in this world, more or less, I am going to tell you you know something about God; I am going to class you among the "brethren beloved." As to whether you agree, I must leave that between the Lord and your own soul; but if you can honestly ascribe to what I am telling you of the sweetness of God's grace realised, the purity, the suitability of heavenly love flowing in this channel to such a sinner as you, you are among the "brethren beloved," and you "know your election." You see, a child knows something when it has learned the first letter of the English alphabet; it is not much, but it is knowledge; and as soon as you know one of your children has the capability to put together two simple letters of the English alphabet, you at once feel this satisfaction,—there is the capability. God has given my child a little capacity, and now I hope it will grow and develop, and that the child will increase in knowledge. And we are not afraid to say, when God enables His children to spell the first little word, we know He will go on to complete the work He has begun. His Word assures us that "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 6).

Therefore, poor little lisping, stammering tongue, there is hope

in Israel concerning thee; for thou couldst not feel one grain of love operating in thy spirit to the living God unless God had manifested His love to thee. Let us have things on a gospel basis: "We love Him because He first loved us." "But," you say, "my love, oh, what a poor, cold, feeble thing it is! If I have a grain of it in operation; I dare not mention it." Of course you will think thus of *your* love, if you have discerned God's. Everything that He does is made so precious to His poor people, that any returns from them they do not care to mention at all; they are all inadequate, all insufficient. The glory of the Lamb, you know, is to eclipse everything else. Jesus is to be the centre of worship, and all the glory, honour, and blessing is to go straight up to Him to all eternity from His living worshippers.

Well now, as I said at the commencement, the Apostle does not bring forward this great and glorious truth for our speculation. I have known people who could argue by the hour about the doctrine of election, but their hearts were as hard as flint. Their conduct evidently proved that although the doctrine was upon their lips their mind was in the world. But to the man who is made to know something of his sinfulness and the desirability of a precious Christ this is something more than a doctrine, it is a living reality; it is the truth as it is in Jesus. And the more you know of it by sweet experience, the more you are enabled by faith to draw from the rich stores of grace that are wrapped up in that one word "Election," the more you will desire to be conformed to the will of Him who hath loved you so freely and so purely. It is by the work of grace in our souls we are enabled to come to conclusions about God's great purposes of Love towards us. That is it. The work of Christ is that which believers rest upon as the rock, the stone, the precious corner-stone which God has laid in Zion; but it is by the Spirit's inworking, indwelling, revealing, witnessing, and sealing, poor souls are enabled to conclude they are upon that rock which will never give way beneath their feet.

And therefore, if you are alive from the dead your feelings will be these when this text is read, in substance, if not exactly in detail: "O that I might to-day pick up one crumb, one gracious, sweet, indubitable evidence that I am among that favoured number whose names are enrolled in the Lamb's Book of Life!" Now, come, can you get along as far as this, feelingly, sometimes,—

"In Thy fair book of life and grace,  
O may I find my name  
Recorded in some humble place,  
Beneath my Lord the Lamb"?

If you can, I can encourage you to go on seeking, with all my heart, for you will not seek in vain.

Now I have two things to enlarge upon a little this afternoon.

I. First, the great, absolute *election* of God;  
II. And secondly, the *evidences* given us of participation in its great blessings.

I. God's *election*. Man cannot accept it, in the pride of his

nature. Surely, if they would not hear it from the lips of a precious Jesus, we cannot expect men will receive it from the lips of His servants, can we? What did they try to do with Him as soon as He began to preach it, and mark out God's discriminating grace in passing by the natural descendants of Abraham, and coming to a poor Gentile creature, and manifesting His mercy and goodness? "Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke iv. 27). Jesus brings this before these proud Jews, these religionists around Him, full of their own self-satisfaction and righteousness, and how did they receive it? They would hurl Him from the brow of the hill, and dash Him to pieces, that such a hateful doctrine might never be heard on this earth again.

I have heard many professed Christians say they would turn the whole thing out of the universe if they could. I remember once, when I was a young seeker, I was longing to know one evidence of my eternal election, and I was reading a book containing a description of the work of grace; and a great religious professor I knew well came in, and noticed the book, and after perusing it said, "If I knew that by taking that book and consuming it to ashes I could turn that horrible doctrine out of this world, I would risk the owner's displeasure, and burn the book." I believe that is only an indication of what the pride of the human heart will assert against the pure truths of God's sovereign grace.

Therefore it is no use for us, when we get into pulpits, to try to palliate or smooth down the edges of Divine truth. That is not Paul's mode. In the next chapter he says: "For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." Now when a man stands before his fellow beings in such a condition of mind as that, it is not a question of speaking words to suit men's tastes, it is a question of discharging the conscience in the Lord's sight; and I do trust that, as far as I know my own heart, that is my desire in coming to Leatherhead to-day.

So when we bring this great truth before our fellow men, we cannot expect anything less than divine grace and love operating in their hearts to fully accept it as a thing worthy of their admiration and love. But O! it is to the spiritually poor a sublime subject, fraught with heavenly consolation.

1. And first of all, it is an *absolute* thing on the part of the Almighty. It is not a mixture of God's purposes and man's thoughts. It is not God producing salvation which man *may* make use of if he chooses. It is not God leaving in man, at the Fall, a spiritual capacity that can be educated and fostered so as to fall in with His own divine purpose. That is the very popular way of putting the thing nowadays. We unhesitatingly affirm that men are absolutely sunken beyond all hope of restoration in themselves; that when God drove out the man, and placed the flaming cherubim to keep the way of the tree of life, that signified that man is irremediably

hopeless and hapless. There are some of my dear friends who have been learning that out a little for perhaps thirty or forty years; you had to say, when you went to God first, "Lord, if mercy reaches me, it must be sovereign mercy; if help comes, it must come straight from heaven, from Thy merciful heart;" and you concluded you knew something about the value of grace then, when He gave you one evidence of His favour; but what about it now, after forty years' travelling in the desert? after seeing yourself at times covered with shame, a poor wretched leper, covered with wounds, and filth, and guilt, until you have thought, "Surely there can be no evidence in me of a spiritual nature; all my evidences darkened, not one good work have I to show"? How glad you have been to accept that gospel representation of Joseph Hart's, in his hymn on the brazen serpent,

"Look, my soul, *though stung to death.*"

Well now, you see the teachings of God, in making known this dreadful plague, and sore, and grief in a man's heart, make this absolute mercy the very desirable thing. And we can glory a little in Paul's question, now and again, as we go along, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. xi. 34-36).

Are you poor enough to accept God's absolute mercy without a farthing in your pocket? without one redeeming feature in your whole character? Are you willing to fall down before the Lamb, and say, "Lost! absolutely lost, but as Thou reachest out Thy hand of love to me; and I have no reason whatever to offer why Thou shouldest do it; all I have to depend or hope upon is this—that Thou wilt be merciful to whom Thou wilt be merciful, and wilt show compassion on whom Thou wilt show compassion"? If there had been anything at all of a redeeming character in man's fallen state, what need would there have been of the blood of God's own dear Son being shed on Calvary's cross till He bowed His precious head in death, and yielded up the ghost?

It can never be Christ and Co. It can never be grace and works; never God's wisdom and man's excellence combined; no, grace is grace, works are works, and there is no mingling the two together.

The act is absolute on the part of God, and therefore we come to another point,—

2. *It can never be undone.* And that is a great hope for some of us. It is *immutable*. There were none in eternity with God to persuade Him to do it; it sprang up spontaneously in His own eternal mind. A precious Jesus was there. You read the viiith of Proverbs and you will find He can say, "Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and My delights were with the sons of men." He was there. The Father covenanted with His own beloved Son in eternity, and put the whole

thing in His hands, and He covenanted to be the Surety, and in the fulness of time to come forth to make known this great and glorious counsel of the Almighty. And He did it, and is in heaven to-day, the mighty Conqueror, to prove He has done it, being "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." And therefore it never can be undone. God points to the sun and moon, in days of depression and captivity of His poor Israel, and says, "Look at the sun; when that ceases to shine, when the stars never appear, when the moon never gives light, then you may conclude I will undo what I have done, but not till then." Friends, it is cheering to look at these things to-day around us and see, with all the changes men have gone through, all the boasted ingenuities of the creature, all the mighty, hellish oppositions to the truth of God that have been known on this earth, till the blazing fires have been lit, and the bodies of God's saints burned to ashes and scattered to the winds of heaven, that the sun goes on shining, and the moon comes up at night, and the precious truth of God still lives, and there is a people on this earth to call the Redeemer blessed, and to love His truth, and glory only in His holy name.

It can never be undone. "Ah, but," say you, "now let us come to inner work: how about it in my soul?" It cannot be undone; the mark of the celestial seal of heaven can never be erased; if we once admitted that, everything could be undone; if the devil can undo one thing, he can undo the whole, and will not leave any stone unturned to bring it about, depend upon it; but no, once you have received the witness in your heart of Jesus' love and grace, there it will remain to all eternity. The higher we hoist these eternal things in our testimony, the more we emphasise God's "shalls" and "wills," the more you will feel your unworthiness of having a part in them, the more you will feel your own beggary; and then there will be the feeling about for *evidences*, and those I must come to now.

II. The *evidences* God Himself is pleased to give us in His unerring Word of participation in this wonderful reality of His eternal election of His dear people in His Son Jesus Christ. And we have not to go very far away from the text we have read to get these evidences. We will take them as they occur in this chapter.

1. The first reason why the Apostle was enabled to class these brethren among the favoured objects of Jehovah's choice was that the gospel had come to their hearts with power. What a sweet word "gospel" is to some people! Glad news! good tidings! Has it ever been so to you? Has it prompted you sometimes to venture to say, "The gospel bears my spirit up;" there is no music like it on this dying earth; when a little unction and dew is realised in the testimony, when a little of the grace of a precious Christ comes flowing in over the wounded, sick and weary soul, hiding its imperfections and defects, there is nothing to be compared to it? I believe the Lord Jesus means to make Himself very precious to His people, and His truth incomparably sweet. We cannot always

receive the gospel with power; we may have to hear it and preach it many times lamenting the want of realised blessing; but has it ever reached our hearts with power? that is the point. Has it ever dissolved your hardest of all hearts? Has it ever subjugated that iron will of yours? Has it ever made those dreadful corruptions depart like wild beasts depart when the morning light comes, and they go crouching down to their dens? "O that I could live like this! that I could every day of my life get a sweet sip of the reality of the gospel and its grace into my soul." That is a mark of God's election. The gospel was to be preached to the poor; liberty was to be proclaimed to those shut up in prison; health was to be proclaimed to those who were bruised, wounded, and beaten.

"Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;  
Jesus in His love will save you,  
Full of pity, joined with power."

Now when the gospel reaches the heart with this unctuous reality of the divine Spirit's witness it does something; and what does it bring about?

2. In the second place, fellowship with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. These Thessalonians had to prove that if they would walk by the gospel rule, and receive something of its benefits in their souls, they must know something about the opposition of the world to it. And so the Apostle points to them as being those who were not ashamed of his sufferings; they did not depart from him because these spiritual things brought down the fire of opposition and rebellion of their fellow creatures upon him; no, they still clung to him. Can you sometimes venture to say, dear friends, that you can "choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season"? It is not an easy thing, you know, to say that. We all of us carry about the love of this world in our deceitful hearts; we all have our peculiar fancies and predilections and likes of the things that are beneath the sun; and it is not pleasing sometimes to have to turn away from that which appeals in such a bewitching manner to our poor carnal hearts, and say, "I would choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." You look into your own breast now, and may the Lord enable you to decide that point,—if there is not a grain of love to His people because they are His, because He has separated them from the world that lieth in wickedness, because He has given them to know something about that secret which the world can never understand. These Thessalonians stood by the Apostle and partook of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus.

3. But further, they brought forth fruits of righteousness, and this was a very sweet and comforting evidence to the Apostle. He was enabled to point to these brethren and tell them that he was bound to thank God for them because their faith grew and their charity abounded one toward another. Things that never grew in nature's garden he saw operating in them. There was a work of

faith among them, a labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. And this enabled him to include them among the brethren beloved who knew their election of God.

Now then, are these fruits of righteousness ever found operating in our spirits? Sometimes you have to say, "No, I cannot see one; my heart is like a barren wilderness, a burned up heath, a desert under the scorching sun"; and you cannot see a green blade anywhere. Ah, but does not your poor heart cry out for God eventually? Are you not described here: "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God" (Psalm lxxxiv. 2)? You cannot glory in anything but righteousness if you love Him who is righteous; and until the rainings of His favour take place in your soul and the sweet green blade of loving desire begins to go forth after Him who sits on yonder throne, you can find no real rest or satisfaction to your spirit. There is a work of faith, is there not, in operation in your soul at times, grappling with the powers of unbelief? There is a labour of love struggling against the carnal enmity of your corrupt nature? And is there not a patience of hope in seeking to hold on, to follow after God, even in the darkness of the midnight hour? These are fruits of righteousness; and they are among the evidences of being elected of God in His dear Son.

4. But further, they were a very zealous, active people in Thessalonica; their zeal abounded so that Paul said, "We need not to speak anything:" "it is very evident to all around that there is the flame of divine love in operation in you believers at Thessalonica." Now, perhaps some of you who might have hoped a little are ready to say, "Oh, if you want to make us very forward and very energetic, and that is an evidence of our election, you will leave us behind." I am not going to speak to you of the energy of the flesh, of the sparks of creature kindling; people may work themselves up into a semblance of love and zeal, but we want something more than that; if we have been with the Lord Jesus Christ it is just that we dread, just that we suspect in our own spirit. Let me use a gospel illustration to help the people of God in this matter. Take Nicodemus: the poor man went in a very shy, hidden way to Christ, almost as if he was ashamed to be found in His company—I am not saying he *was* so, but that was the apparent attitude—just to ask Him certain things; there did not seem a lot of zeal or love in that. Christ stopped to speak the immortal word of life into his heart, and by-and-by it was seen to be operating. When the enemies were gathered around the Lord Jesus to put a stop to His testimony and hinder the work of His redemption, if that had been possible, and the soldiers came back with their story (wonderfully touching words), and said, "Never man spake like this Man," Nicodemus has a little word to say: "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth?" (John vii. 51). But it is enough to bring down the opposition of the world upon him; there is, evidently, the witness of real love in it, and it must stir up opposition against His holy Majesty—"Art thou also one of them?" "Search and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

There is the little testimony, but what is it in the sight of Heaven? It may not be much even in the visible Church here below, but what is it to God? that is the point. And presently the dead body of our Lord Jesus is taken down from the cross. Now where is Nicodemus? There; not running away from it, but going towards it. The body of Jesus is dead on the cross; what about the work? The enemies are crying out in their triumph that they had put an end to Him. Ah, but it cannot quench faith in Nicodemus's heart. Friends, things have looked very bad to you sometimes, I have no doubt, and your heart has been ready to sink within you, and your conclusion has been, "It seems as if my hope has given up the ghost now." But faith is an immortal reality, and it will shine out when drawn into operation by the Author of it. I say that little testimony would not be much in the eyes of the world, but O, it is a living testimony; God has left it on record in His own precious, infallible Word, that it may be an encouragement to those who say, "I cannot see a great zeal and manifestation of love in my poor breast; if I am anywhere I seem the last of the flock, limping along." Ah, but are you limping towards Him? that is the point.

5. Just one more evidence of the election of God, and that is, to wait for His Son from heaven. Now this was the position of these Thessalonians; they had been turned from their idols to the true and living God, and now their attitude was, waiting for His Son from heaven. And that is the attitude of those who are elected of God; and what are they waiting for? Waiting for His gracious appearing on their behalf; not only for Him to come on yonder cloud presently to bid them welcome into heaven, but waiting for Him to appear for them in other ways; in providence and in grace they are living upon the Unseen which is eternal; and their best joys are those secret things that take place when none but God is near.

Now then, is this your attitude day by day? Are you found, sometimes, in the closet, waiting, longing, anticipating, hoping for the fulfilment of the divine promises? It is not an easy thing to wait in this bustling world, with "Lo here!" and "Lo there!" in our ears by day and by night, and men going their own way; no easy matter to wait at God's throne. But He says, none that wait upon Him shall be ashamed; and He does now and then grant His dear people a little token for good to cheer their spirits. He does now and again look through the lattice of some ordinance and give them a sweet sense of nearness to Himself, some drawing of spirit towards Him who is their hope. And these are gracious evidences of eternal election.

"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." You see it proceeded from God's own love; that pure river of the Water of Life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb; and where it touches the spirit it brings love into operation. True religion is nothing less than that,—the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost; and where that is so, Election won't make a man hard, unfeeling, unsympathetic. O, no! When the heart is dissolved by a sense of God's unmerited goodness, God's

dear people are made mellow, gentle, childlike and simple; and they manifest that they have been with Christ and have learned of Him. But they want something more than sentiment, something more than fancy; they can be satisfied with nothing less than divine realities.

May the Lord enable us to trace some sweet evidence that we are not out of the secret, for His Name's sake. Amen.

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