

Christian Retirement

Part 73

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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ON ELECTION

It is very dangerous to indulge a spirit of curiosity respecting the deep things of God. There are mysteries in the kingdom of grace, and in the kingdom of nature, which surpass the highest powers of created intelligence to comprehend. But, as in the natural world, enough is made level to our capacity, to render us comfortable and happy with respect to food, clothing, and other temporal conveniences; so likewise in things pertaining to the spiritual world, sufficient is revealed to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ.

That desire of being wise above what is written, which is the effect of a proud, unhallowed curiosity, is strongly reprehended in the holy Scriptures. Our blessed Lord frequently repressed this spirit of curious inquiry which is so natural to us. When one asked him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" his practical answer was, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." As if he had said, "trouble not yourself about the secret counsels of heaven; take heed to yourself; or you shall likewise perish."

At another time, when his disciples asked him, saying, "Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power." When Jesus had been foretelling Peter by what death he should glorify God; Peter, seeing John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, felt a curiosity to know what would become of him also; and said, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" Jesus said unto him, "If I will that he tarry until I come, what is that to you—follow you me." Thus we see how pointedly our Lord checked that prying into secret things, which, if indulged, would take us from the plain path of childlike obedience, and draw us into labyrinths, where our minds would soon be "in wandering mazes lost."

But although we cannot fathom, we are nevertheless to believe from the heart, the mysterious truths of God. Should any of these truths seem to contradict each other, it arises altogether from the finite nature of our own mind. Instead, therefore, of laboring to reconcile the apparently opposing statements of eternal truth, by systems of human invention; it is the part of humility to receive each, in the simplicity of faith, as God has been pleased to reveal them to us in his holy word. By adopting this mode, we shall not be shackled by human opinion, nor be afraid of inconsistency, while we state the simple truth as it is in Jesus.

How rich, how full, and how extensive are the blessings which Paul declared to the Thessalonian church. They reach from everlasting to everlasting, and are calculated to animate all true believers to works of faith, labors of love, and patience of hope; since he, who has promised, is faithful, and will never forsake the work of his own hands. "We are bound to give thanks always to God, for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth, whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thess. ii, 13,14.)

Some may ask; how could the apostle know that the Thessalonians were the chosen of God? Had he ever been favored with a view of the book of life? Had he ever seen their names written in heaven? had he ever explored the secret decrees and counsels or the Almighty? No. This eminent servant of Christ searched another book, even the volume of grace, the revealed word of God. There he discovered the clear marks and evidences of God's redeemed people. And being himself under the immediate inspiration of the holy Spirit, he was enabled to draw just conclusions respecting the state and character of those who embraced the Gospel.

In the first chapter of this Epistle to the Thessalonians, the apostle displays in glowing colors the faith, love, patience, zeal, and hope of this infant church their readiness to receive the word; their professed subjection to the Gospel; their cheerful waiting for Christ, and their joy under manifold afflictions. Hence he drew the conclusion, that they were the chosen of God; "knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." Whether these words mean God's choice of them; or their choice of God, it comes to the same thing; for, "if we love him, it is because he first loved us."

All, then, who truly believe in Jesus, and who are renewed in the spirit of their minds through the power of the Holy Spirit, evidence their election of God. "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

But another work of grace is mentioned by the apostle; they were effectually called by the Gospel. (2 Thess. ii, 13.)

Thousands are called, by the faithful preaching of the Gospel every Sabbath day, to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on the hope set before them in a crucified Savior. Yet how few obey the call, and come unto Jesus, weary and heavy-laden with the burden of their sins.

How few are effectually called. The great mass of baptized Christians hear the words of life, but regard them not. They love the world, and cling to it. They love sin, and will not part with it. They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. And if it be asked, why do they thus act? the answer is given by Paul himself; writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; "If our Gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those who are lost. In whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." We may therefore conclude, that all, who believingly obey the call of mercy, and draw near unto God through Jesus Christ, evidence their election of God, according to the plain, grammatical meaning of the apostle's declaration.

The other blessing mentioned by Paul, and which crowns the whole, is, the eternal glorification of all who are thus effectually called, and evidence their election in Christ by faith and holiness; "Whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Our divine Master has declared, "He that endures unto the end, shall be saved." Peter assured the Christian strangers who were scattered abroad, that they were "kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."

Hence it follows, that all who are effectually called by the Gospel, shall finally obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, being preserved through faith unto God's everlasting kingdom. Thus grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Gospel is designed to stain the pride of human glory, and to lay man in the dust of humiliation. "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not of work; lest any man should boast; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." Such is the humbling, yet delightful language of the inspired apostle.

The carnal heart rises against these abasing, purifying doctrines of the cross, which strip the sinner of all self-righteous dependence, and strike at the root of all fleshly indulgences. The proud sinner must become a fool in his own estimation, and feel himself to be nothing, before he can receive with gratitude these stupendous blessings offered for his acceptance in the Gospel.

Divine grace alone can effect this mighty change. But what cannot the power of Omnipotence accomplish? "From eternity to eternity I am God. No one can oppose what I do. No one can reverse my actions" is the voice of a Sovereign, "who works all things after the counsel of his own will;" who has said, "my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

Man, if left to himself, would never seek after God. His language is, "I have loved strangers, and after them I will go." But when God says, "LIVE;"—the soul shall as assuredly live, as when at the creation he said, "Let there be light, and there was light." The chaotic mass was formed to order and beauty, when the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the deep; and so shall the disordered soul be transformed after the divine image, when Almighty Grace puts forth its new creating power. "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise."

When the leper said, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean;" Jesus replied, "I will, be clean; and immediately his leprosy departed from him." In Jesus, we behold "the mighty God"—"God manifest in the flesh," exerting his benevolent power in healing diseases, in stilling the raging elements, in casting out devils, in multiplying provisions, in raising the dead, in revealing men's thoughts, in forgiving sin.

And now that he is in glory, and reigns as sovereign Lord; no darkness of the understanding, no hardness of the heart, no rebellion of the will, no alienation of the affection, no outward opposition, or inward repugnance to the truth, can prevent the conversion and final salvation of that soul, whom God loves with an everlasting love, and draws with loving-kindness to the cross of Christ.

"This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." This is the wonderful announcement of the messengers of peace.

As believers in Jesus are declared to be "chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy, and without blame before him in love;" so the change which passes upon the soul when brought by the Spirit to the love and practice of holiness, as evidential of its election in Christ, is described in Scripture by the boldest figures.

"And you has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord." "Giving thanks unto the Father, who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and behold, all things are become new."

This blessed conversion from sin to holiness is thus declared by the apostle to the Romans; "You were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." To the Thessalonians; "You turned from idols to serve the living and true God." To the Corinthians; "Know you not, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? and such were some of you; but you are washed; but you are sanctified; but you are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

The way and means of the church's salvation were also foreordained. Jesus is declared to be the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Faith is the divinely-appointed instrument, by which the sinner is enabled to lay hold on Christ. The Holy Spirit is promised to all who ask for this unspeakable gift. "Ho, every one that thirsts, come to the waters," is the gracious call.

The Gospel is designed to be a universal blessing; for the command is, "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." The invitation is general—the command to preach the Gospel is unlimited. None are excluded but such as, through unbelief, exclude themselves; for "God desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;" "he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" "he will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Such are the views which Infinite Wisdom and Love has given us in the pages of inspired truth. Eternal misery is there declared to be the fruit of man's willful apostasy and rebellion; and eternal happiness the free gift of sovereign grace through Jesus Christ. Thrice happy, then, are they who experience the saving grace of God; who hear in faith; who obey the call of mercy; and who follow the Lord fully and perseveringly in filial obedience.

These are the objects of the Savior's love and care; theirs are the promises; and to them belong the glories which shall shortly be revealed. Oh happy people! saved by the Lord.

"Blessed Savior, draw my heart sweetly and powerfully to yourself. Oh make me your temple! May your word reach my heart, and your love constrain my soul to love and obedience. Like Matthew, may I cheerfully obey your call, leave all, and follow you. Subdue every rebellious inclination; and let nothing dwell within me that is contrary to your will. Root out of my heart all evil affections, and fill me with the fruits of righteousness. May my happy position ever be at the foot of the cross. There wean my heart from earthly things, and bind me to yourself by cords of everlasting love. Oh let me never, never wander from you; but preserve me to your kingdom and glory for your infinite mercies' sake."

Dear Shepherd of the chosen flock,
I love to hear your voice;
When full of kind redeeming love,
You bid my heart rejoice.

Oh, let me never leave the road,
That leads to your abode!
Oh, suffer not my feet to stray
From you, the living God!

It is your delightful work to save,
Your pleasure and your joy;
Then let your praise each fleeting hour
My grateful thoughts employ.

A stranger, Lord, I will not know,
Through your preserving grace;
But follow you with cheerful steps
To heaven, your dwelling-place.

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