



### Part Three

This is a branch of the subject which I hold to be of vast importance. All revealed truth is liable to be wrested and perverted. It is one of Satan's chief devices to make the Gospel odious by tempting men to distort it. Perhaps no part of Christian theology has suffered so much damage in this way as the doctrine of personal Election. Let me proceed to explain what I mean.

"I am not one of God's Elect," says one man. "It is no use for me to do anything at all in religion. It is waste of time for me to keep the Sabbath, attend the public worship of God, read my Bible, say my prayers. If I am to be saved, I shall be saved. If I am to be lost, I shall be lost. In the mean tune I sit still and wait." This is a sore disease of soul. But I fear it is a very common one!

"I am one of God's Elect," says another man. "I am sure to be saved and go to heaven at last, no matter how I may live and go on. Exhortations to holiness are legal. Recommendations to watch, and crucify self, are bondage. Though I fall, God sees no sin in me and loves me all the same. Though I often give way to temptation, God will not let me be altogether lost. Where is the use of doubts and fears and anxieties? I am confident I am one of the Elect, and as such I shall be found in glory." This again, is a sore disease. But I fear it is not altogether uncommon.

Now what shall be said to men who talk in this way? They need to be told very plainly that they are wresting a truth of the Bible to their own destruction, and turning meat into poison. They need to be reminded that their notion of Election is a miserably unscriptural one. Election according to the Bible is a very different thing from what they suppose it to be. It is most intimately connected with other truths of equal importance with itself, and from these truths it ought never to be separated. Truths which God has joined together no man should ever dare to put asunder.

- (a) For one thing, the doctrine of Election was never meant to destroy man's responsibility for the state of his own soul. The Bible everywhere addresses men as free agents, as beings accountable to God, and not as mere logs, and bricks, and stones. It is false to say that it is useless to tell men to cease to do evil, to learn to do well, to repent, to believe, to turn to God, to pray. Everywhere in Scripture it

is a leading principle that man can lose his own soul, that if he is lost at last it will be his own fault, and his blood will be on his own head. The same inspired Bible which reveals this doctrine of Election is the Bible which contains the words, "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?"—"Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (Ezek. xviii. 31; John v. 40; iii. 19.) The Bible never says that sinners miss heaven because they are not Elect, but because they "neglect the great salvation," and because they will not repent and believe. The last judgment will abundantly prove that it is not the want of God's Election, so much as laziness, the love of sin, unbelief, and unwillingness to come to Christ, which ruins the souls that are lost.

- (b) For another thing, the doctrine of Election was never meant to prevent the fullest, freest offer of salvation to every sinner. In preaching and trying to do good we are warranted and commanded to set an open door before every man, woman, and child, and to invite every one to come in. We know not who are God's Elect, and whom He means to call and convert. Our duty is to invite all without exception. We ought to say, "Awake,—repent; believe, come to Christ,—be converted,—turn,—call upon God, strive to enter in,—come, for all things are ready, for God loves you, and Christ has died for you." To tell us that none will hear and be saved except God's Elect, is quite needless. We know it very well. But to tell us that on that account it is useless to offer salvation to any at all, is simply absurd. Who are we that we should pretend to know who will be found God's Elect at last? No! indeed. Those who now seem first may prove last, and those who seem last may prove first in the judgment day. We will invite all, in the firm belief that the invitation will do good to some. We will prophesy to the dry bones, if God commands us. We will offer life to all, though many reject the offer. In so doing we believe that we walk in the steps of our Master and His Apostles.
- (c) For another thing, Election can only be known by its fruits. The Elect of God can only be discerned from those who are not Elect by their faith and life. We cannot climb up into the secret of God's eternal counsels. We cannot read the book of life. The fruits of the Spirit, seen and manifested in a man's conversation, are the only grounds on which we can ascertain that he is one of God's Elect. Where the marks of God's Elect can be seen, there, and there only, have we any warrant for saying "this is one of the Elect."—How do I know that yon distant ship on the horizon of the sea has any pilot or steersman on board? I cannot with the best telescope discern anything but her masts and sails. Yet I see her steadily moving in one direction. That is enough for me. I know by this that there is a guiding hand on board, though I cannot see it. Just so it is with God's Election. The eternal decree we cannot possibly see. But the result of that decree cannot be hid. It was when St. Paul remembered the faith and hope and love of the Thessalonians, that he cried, I "know your Election of God." (1 Thess. i. 4.) For ever let us hold fast this principle in considering the subject before us. To talk of any one being Elect when he is living in sin, is nothing better than blasphemous folly. The Bible knows of no Election except through "sanctification,"—no eternal choosing except that we should be "holy,"—no predestination except to be "conformed to the image of God's Son." When these things are lacking, it is mere waste of time to talk of Election. (1 Pet. i. 2; Ephes. i. 4; Rom. viii. 29.)

(d) Last, but not least, Election was never intended to prevent men making a diligent use of all means of grace. On the contrary, the neglect of means is a most suspicious symptom, and should make us very doubtful about the state of a man's soul. Those whom the Holy Ghost draws He always draws to the written Word of God and to prayer. When there is the real grace of God in a heart, there will always be love to the means of grace. What saith the Scripture? The very Christians at Rome to whom St. Paul wrote about foreknowledge and predestination, are the same to whom he says, "Continue instant in prayer." (Rom. xii. 12.) The very Ephesians who were "chosen before the foundation of the world," are the same to whom it is said, "Put on the whole armour of God—take the sword of the Spirit—pray always with all prayer." (Ephes. vi. 18.) The very Thessalonians whose Election Paul said he "knew," are the Christians to whom he cries in the same Epistle, "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thess. v. 17.) The very Christians whom Peter calls "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," are the same to whom he says, "Desire the sincere milk of the Word—watch unto prayer." (1 Pet. ii. 2; iv. 7.) The evidence of texts like these is simply unanswerable and overwhelming. I shall not waste time by making any comment on them. An Election to salvation which teaches men to dispense with the use of all means of grace, may please ignorant people, fanatics, and Antinomians. But I take leave to say that it is an Election of which I can find no mention in God's Word.

1. I know not that I can wind up this part of my subject better than by quoting the latter part of the Seventeenth Article of the Church of England. I commend it to the special attention of all my readers, and particularly the last paragraph.—"As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: so, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.

"Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture and, in our doings, that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God."

These are wise words. This is sound speech that can not be condemned. For ever let us cling to the principle contained in this statement. Well would it have been for the Church of Christ, if the doctrine of Election had always been handled in this fashion. Well would it be for all Christians who feel puzzled by the heights and depths of this mighty doctrine, if they would remember the words of Scripture,—"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." (Deut. xxix. 29.)

I will now conclude the whole subject with a few plain words of personal application.

- (1) First of all let me entreat every reader of this paper not to refuse this doctrine of Election, merely because it is high, mysterious, and hard to be understood. Is it reverent to do so? Is it treating God's Word with the respect due to revelation? Is it right to reject anything written for our learning, and to give it hard names, merely because some misguided men have misused it, and turned it to a bad purpose? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration. If men begin rejecting a truth of Scripture merely because they do not like it, they are on slippery ground. There is no saying how far they may fall.

What after all do men gain by refusing the doctrine of Election? Does the system of those who deny Election save one soul more than that of those who hold it? Certainly not.—Do those who hold Election narrow the way to heaven, and make salvation more difficult than those who deny it? Certainly not.—The opponents of Election maintain that none will be saved except those who repent and believe. Well: the advocates of Election say just the same!—The opponents of Election proclaim loudly that none but holy people go to heaven. Well: the advocates of Election proclaim the same doctrine. just as loudly!—What then, I ask once more, is gained by denying the truth of Election? I answer, Nothing what ever. And yet, while nothing is gained, a great deal of comfort seems to be lost. It is cold comfort to be told that God never thought on me before I repented and believed. But to know and feel that God had purposes of mercy toward me before the foundation of the world, and that all the work of grace in my heart is the result of an everlasting covenant and an eternal Election, is a thought full of sweet and unspeakable consolation. A work that was planned before the foundation of the world, by an Architect of almighty power and perfect wisdom, is a work which will never be allowed to fail and be overthrown.

In the next place, let me entreat every reader of this paper to approach this doctrine of Election from the right end, and not to confuse his mind by inverting the order of truth. Let him begin with the first elements of Christianity,—with simple repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and so work his way toward Election. Let him not waste his time by beginning with inquiries about his own Election. Let him rather attend first to the plain marks of an Elect man, and never rest till these marks are his own. Let him break off from all known sin, and flee to Christ for pardon, peace, mercy, and grace. Let him cry mightily to God in prayer, and give the Lord no rest till he feels within him the real witness of the Spirit. He that begins in this fashion will thank God one day for His electing grace, in eternity if not in time. It is an old and quaint saying, but a very true one: "A man must first go to the little Grammar-school of Repentance and Faith, before he enters the great University of Election and Predestination."

2. The plain truth is, that God's scheme of salvation is like a ladder let down from heaven to earth, to bring together the holy God, and the sinful creature, man. God is at the top of the ladder and man is at the bottom.—The top of the ladder is far above, out of our sight, and we have no eyes to see it. There, at the top of that ladder, are God's eternal purposes,—His everlasting covenant, His Election, His predestination of a people to be saved by Christ. From the top of that ladder comes down that full and rich provision of mercy for sinners which is revealed to us in the Gospel.—The bottom of that ladder is close to sinful man on earth, and consists of the simple steps of repentance and faith. By them he must begin to climb upwards. In the humble use of them he shall mount higher and higher every year, and get clearer glimpses of good things yet to come.—What can be more plain than the duty of using the steps which

are close to our hands? What can be more foolish than to say, I will not put my foot on the steps at the bottom, until I clearly understand the steps at the top? Away with such perverse and childish reasonings! Common sense alone might tell us the path of duty, if we would only make use of it. That duty is to use simple truths honestly, and then to believe that higher truths will one day be made plain to our eyes. How, and in what manner the love of the eternal God comes down to us, may have much about it which is hard for poor worms like us to understand. But how we poor sinners are to draw near to God is clear and plain as the sun at noon-day. Jesus Christ stands before us, saying, "Come unto Me!" Let us not waste time in doubting, quibbling, and disputing. Let us come to Christ at once, just as we are. Let us lay hold and believe!

In the last place, let me entreat every true Christian who reads this paper to remember the exhortation of St Peter,—“Give diligence, to make your calling and Election sure.” (2 Pet. i. 10.)

3. Surer in the sight of God than your Election has been from all eternity, you cannot make it. With Him there is no uncertainty. Nothing that God does for His people is left to chance, or liable to change. But surer and more evident to yourself and to the Church, your Election can be made; and this is the point that I wish to press on your attention. Strive to obtain such well-grounded assurance of hope that, as St. John says, you may “know that you know Christ.” (1 John ii. 3.) Strive so to live and walk in this world that all may take knowledge of you as one of God’s children, and feel no doubt that you are going to heaven.

Listen not for a moment to those who tell you that in this life we can never be sure of our own spiritual state, and must always be in doubt. The Roman Catholics say so. The ignorant world says so. The devil says so. But the Bible says nothing of the kind. There is such a thing as strong assurance of our acceptance in Christ, and a Christian should never rest till he has obtained it. That a man may be saved without this strong assurance I do not deny. But that without it he misses a great privilege, and much comfort, I am quite sure.

Strive, then, with all diligence, “to make your calling and Election sure.”—“Lay aside every weight and the sins that most easily beset you.” (Heb. xii. 2.) Be ready to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye, if need be. Settle it firmly in your mind, that it is the highest privilege on this side the grave to know that you are one of the children of God.

They that contend for place and office in this world are sure to be disappointed. When they have done all and succeeded to the uttermost, their honours are thoroughly unsatisfied, and their rewards are short-lived. Seats in Parliament and places in Cabinets must all be vacated one day. At best they can only be held for a few years. But he that is one of God’s Elect has a treasure which can never be taken from him, and a place from which he can never be removed. Blessed is that man who sets his heart on this Election. There is no election like the Election of God!

#### FOOTNOTE

The following weighty passage, from the pen of the judicious Hooker, is commended to the attention of all in the present day. It is the opening passage of the first book of his Ecclesiastical Polity:

He that goeth about to persuade a multitude that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favourable hearers, because they know the manifold defects whereunto every kind of regiment or government is subject; but the secret lets and difficulties, which in public proceedings are innumerable and inevitable, they have not ordinarily the judgment to consider. And because such as openly reprove disorders of States are taken for principal friends to the common benefit of all, and for men that carry singular freedom of mind, under this fair and plausible colour whatsoever they utter passeth for good and current. That which is wanting in the weight of their speech is supplied by the aptness of men's minds to accept and believe it. Whereas, on the other side, if we maintain things that are established, we have not only to strive with a number of heavy prejudices, deeply rooted in the breasts of men, who think that herein we serve the times, and speak in favour of the present state, because we either hold or seek preferment; but also to bear such reception as minds so averted beforehand usually take against that which they are loth should be poured into them