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CHRISTIAN ELECTION EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED.

I THESS. 1:4. *Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*

THE subject suggested to the mind by this brief expression, is one which has been the occasion of long protracted and strenuous controversy in the church. This dispute, although now greatly abated, still exists among the different denominations of Christians, and still it continues to interrupt and, in a degree, to lessen that cordial affection and harmony, which all the truly pious will acknowledge ought to characterize and distinguish all the genuine disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is still a marked difference and contrariety of sentiment respecting this important article of the faith once delivered to the saints.

In this discourse the leading object will be, to explain the sense in which Christian election is understood and maintained by true Calvinists, and to defend it against the false constructions given to it by its opposers, as well as by some pious people, who profess, in general, to subscribe to the Calvinistic creed.

Diffidence, I am very conscious, becomes me in undertaking to discuss this mysterious and controverted subject. It is my sincere desire to undertake the discussion of it in the spirit of Christian meekness and candor, and with the kindest feelings towards those pious followers of the Redeemer, who hold a creed different from mine, as well as towards those of my own church, who find it difficult to reconcile their views to the doctrine of God's sovereign purposes and decrees.

The apostle Paul, in the introduction of this epistle, expresses his devout thanksgivings to God for the success of his ministry at Thessalonica; the blessed effects of his labors having been manifested in the lively faith, active love, and patient hope, of the Christians of that place. The evangelical graces which adorned their profession of love to the Redeemer, he viewed as satisfactory evidence of their election of God, and evidently alludes to them as the foundation of his knowledge of their election of God. He reasons from the effect to the cause. His ministry among the people at Thessalonica had been effectual in promoting their conversion and salvation; hence he justly inferred their election of God.

I. WHAT IS ELECTION? AND THE EVIDENCE OF ITS BEING A SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE.

Election is a plain and familiar term, and is not involved in any peculiar mystery. This word, as every person knows, is synonymous with the familiar and intelligible word, *choice*. The election of God is his *choosing a part of the fallen race of Adam in the Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life, and ORDAINING the MEANS by which they are to be qualified and prepared for future glory*. This view of the subject is clearly expressed in Ephesians 1:4, 5, 6. "According as he hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved." The same sentiments occur again in 2 Thess. 2:13, 14. "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath 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." The apostle Peter likewise advances the same doctrine in his 1st Epistle 2:1, 2, in which he addresses the Christians to whom he was writing, as being elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Any candid person, who will attentively read these quotations from the writings of the inspired apostles must, we think, be convinced that they speak explicitly of God's having chosen some persons, and that before the foundation of the world, that they should obtain salvation in Jesus Christ, and that they should be prepared for heaven through faith and sanctification.

Now, if it be admitted that God has chosen some persons, or a part of mankind in Christ, unto eternal life, it will follow as a plain consequence, that some persons, or a part of mankind, have not been so chosen. If it had been God's purpose, or determination, to save all men, then there would have been nothing said about a choice; for, upon that supposition, there would, in reality, have been no choice made. The very idea of a choice implies that some are taken and some left. A choice must terminate upon some and not upon others; upon a part and not the whole. In any other sense, a choice, in relation to the human family, is wholly inconceivable. Why it is that God, in his sovereign and eternal purpose of grace, should have chosen some and not others unto everlasting life, is not for us, at present, to know; but, if the Bible teaches us, as it plainly does, that God has made such a choice, then he has certainly made it, and we have reason to *believe he has made it* in a manner consistent with his infinite wisdom, justice, and benevolence. Some of our Christian brethren prefer the idea of an election of characters, but this scheme, when rightly considered, will be found to be attended with the same difficulty as that for which it is intended to be substituted. If Christian characters are not found in all men, as all must acknowledge, then it is evident that election,

even according to this scheme, will be restricted to a part only of mankind. According to that principle, it is a choice of a certain part only; that is, all to whom Christian characters appertain, and no more. Election, then, whether we understand it as referring to persons or to Christian characters, will embrace only a part of the human family. All will not be saved agreeably to either scheme. It is agreed, on all hands, that none will be saved but those in whom Christian characters are found. If, therefore, we restrict election to Christian characters, it will refer only to a part of mankind. Understanding the doctrine of election in this sense, a part only of mankind can be viewed as chosen of God to eternal life. That part the apostle Paul, in one of his epistles, has represented as the election of grace.

The doctrine of election, in whatever sense it ought to be taken, is a doctrine which is certainly taught in the Bible. To avoid prolixity, we will add only a few quotations to those which we have already adduced. This doctrine is found in every part of the word of God. We find it in many parts of the Old Testament. In the sixty-fifth psalm, the holy Psalmist presents to the glorious object of his pious adoration, the following devotional address: "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts." "Blessed, indeed," says Dr. Scott on this verse, "is that man whom the Lord chooseth, and by his Spirit causeth to approach him in humble faith and prayer; and who, finding acceptance with him, learns to delight and be at home in his courts and ordinances." To the same purport are the words of the Lord, by the prophet Isaiah, 65:9: "And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains, and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there." The people alluded to in these words was ancient Israel, who, generally, in the Old Testament, are spoken of as God's chosen people, because, in preference to all other nations, the Lord had placed his name and established his worship among them, and honored them with his peculiar protection and blessing. But now, the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles being broken down, the same gracious promise extends to all who become true Israelites by faith in Jesus Christ. All true believers are his elect, and shall inherit his promised blessings; for, in the New Testament, we read, that the blessing of Abraham comes upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.

But the doctrine of election is more explicitly and clearly taught by our blessed Savior, and by the inspired evangelists and apostles. Our Savior has spoken of the elect in frequent instances. When he was predicting the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the awful calamities which were to attend that event, he comforted his disciples with the assurance that, "For the elect's sake, whom the Lord hath chosen, he hath shortened the days." Mark 13:20. In the same chapter, verses 26, 27, we read again: "Then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds, with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth, to the uttermost part of heaven." In each of these predictions, our Savior makes a plain distinction

between the elect and the rest of mankind, and speaks of special favor being showed to them; and we may observe, in every instance where the elect are spoken of in the Scriptures, they are always represented as the objects of God's peculiar favor.

In the writings of the holy evangelists and apostles, who, as all Christians must allow, wrote as they were inspired by the Holy Ghost, the doctrine of Christian election occurs in frequent instances, and is expressed with the utmost plainness and candor. The apostle Paul, that zealous, faithful, and successful minister of Christ, has something on the subject of election in almost all his epistles. We have already made two or three quotations from the writings of this holy man. We ask your patient attention while we add a few more. We quote first from the Epistle to the Romans. The ninth chapter of that Epistle is wholly occupied in stating and explaining the doctrine of election. In that chapter, the apostle illustrates the riches of the grace of God and his adorable sovereignty by the examples of Isaac and Ishmael; Esau and Jacob; and of Pharaoh. He shows, from the Old Testament, that God chose Isaac to be the heir of his promised blessing, in preference to Ishmael and to the sons of Abraham by Keturah; that he chose Jacob, in preference to Esau; but we will insert the apostle's own words: "Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but in Isaac shall thy seed be called." The apostle then proceeds to another example in verses 10—13: "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac, (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, (Malachi 1:2, 3) Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." We find no reason assigned any where in the Bible, why special favor was showed to Jacob in preference to Esau. It did not at first accord with the views and feelings of the good old patriarch; but so soon as he became convinced that God had chosen Jacob to inherit the blessing, he calmly acquiesced in the divine will, and confirmed the blessing to his younger son, although he had previously expected, agreeably to prevailing custom, to have awarded the privileges connected with the divine promise to his first-born, Esau. The apostle also introduces the instance of Pharaoh, respecting whom God by Moses had declared: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." So then, St. Paul infers, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy;" and then he adds, in verses 17, 18: "For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." This portion of Scripture clearly teaches the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty in the dispensation of his mercy, and of his righteousness in *permitting wilful transgressors to go on in sin*, and then punishing them for having, by a *course of wilful sinning, hardened their hearts to con-*

firmed impenitence. God did *not* advance Pharaoh to the throne of Egypt in order that *he might* disobey his commands and contemn his sovereign authority; but the haughty monarch *hardened his own heart* by a voluntary course of sinning; by a succession of acts of disobedience to the positive injunctions of God; and it is in the same way that all obdurate transgressors become the cause of their own perdition. There is no divine decree which lays any one under any *necessity of leading a sinful life*, but it is decreed—and who can say the decree is unjust—that “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”

In the 11th chapter of the same epistle, the apostle mentions the subject of election again, and shows that a part of the Jewish nation was graciously chosen to salvation through the sovereign mercy and free grace of God in Jesus Christ. In verses 5, 6, he says: “Even so, then, at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And, if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. What then, (he continues in verse 7th,) Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for, but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” In these verses, we think, the apostle plainly teaches, that the election of some sinners to eternal life is a matter entirely of grace, or free favor. He does not hold out the idea, that men are chosen to salvation *in consequence of their faith or obedience*, but wholly out of God’s unmerited mercy and sovereign good pleasure.

The apostle Peter also asserts the doctrine of Christian election as explicitly as the apostle Paul. In the introduction to his First Epistle, addressed to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, he calls them “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” Peter considered the Christians to whom he was writing, as having been chosen in Christ, according to the foreknowledge of God, and taught them, that the object of their election was, that they should be saved through sanctification of the Spirit, and the merit of the atonement made by Jesus Christ. Now, if Peter and the other apostles, who were cotemporary with our blessed Savior, and who received immediately from him the essential doctrines of his kingdom of grace; if these holy men have taught and asserted the doctrine of election, we must think it is a doctrine worthy of credit, and abundantly confirmed by the best authority. If, then, the first ministers of Christ’s kingdom have, in their published writings, inculcated the doctrine of absolute election, may not their successors in office be permitted, without censure, to imitate their example? Have we not, from the New Testament, ample authority for assuring all true believers in Jesus Christ of their election of God?

But some pious people enter a demurrer, and allege that, though the doctrine of election is a doctrine of Scripture, Calvinistic Christians do not hold it as it is taught in the Bible. This will merit particular investigation; for doctrinal principles which are not to be found in the Bible can have no title to our belief. Calvinists, though con-

scious that they are fallible, like other men, feel a firm persuasion that the scheme of Christian election to which they have subscribed is the very scheme which is sanctioned by the Holy Scriptures. From the writings of the apostles, Peter and Paul, as we have already shown, all those who are denominated the elect were chosen of God in Christ before the foundation of the world. The apostle says, in a passage which we quoted above, Eph. 1:4: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Again, in 2 Thess. 2:13, he says: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." These two portions of the word of God, construed agreeably to their literal and grammatical signification, will conclusively establish the idea of an eternal election. It is objected, I know, that these modes of expression are sometimes used in the Scriptures in relation to things which take place in time. It has hence been argued, that men are elected, not before the foundation of the world, as the apostle alleges, but at the period of their conversion. This idea of election would seem to represent God's choosing us to salvation as the consequence of our having first chosen him as our Savior and portion. But our conversion is the *effect*, not the *cause* of God's electing love. Our conversion is an evidence of our having been chosen of God in Christ to eternal life, and this choice the apostle represents as having taken place before the foundation of the world. Indeed, if we believe in the eternity of the divine existence, we must also believe that his purposes and decrees are eternal like his nature. The conversion and salvation of his chosen people is the result or effect of his eternal purpose of grace, but, though the object of his purpose takes place in time, the purpose itself, agreeably to the apostle's views, was formed in eternity, or before the foundation of the world. In the succeeding verse, he still farther enlarges upon the same subject: "Having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ." In this mode of expression election is manifestly represented as being antecedent to conversion. The word predestinated is in the past tense, and our adoption as children—that is, converted persons—is plainly held out to be a consequence of our having been predestinated or elected.

The natural and obvious construction of the other passage will clearly tend to corroborate the idea of eternal election. It speaks of Christians having been from the beginning chosen to salvation. It is plain that, by this mode of speaking, their salvation is to be understood as the end or object of their election, and not as the cause of it. This gracious purpose God accomplishes by the appointment and use of appropriate means: "sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth."

This, it is obvious, is the natural and rational order of things. In the common affairs of life, a rational man, who proposes to himself the accomplishment of some important object, will, in the first place, direct his thoughts to the object to be accomplished, and then to the adoption of *suitable means* for effecting it. Something like this, we think, agreeably to the apostle's doctrine, is the order of things in our election of God. He teaches that the object of God's gracious purpose in election is the everlasting salvation of his people, and that for the

accomplishment of this gracious purpose he has appointed faith and sanctification as the proper means. He has appointed the word of truth to be the instrumental means of the conversion and salvation of his chosen people, and sends his Spirit to renew them in holiness, and make them "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." He represents both the end and the means of its accomplishment as the object of the divine purpose from eternity; but, in the order of things, the end first, and the means last.

Our election of God, according to his divine oracles, we also believe and thankfully acknowledge to be the effect of his distinguishing mercy and goodness. Distinguishing grace, we know, is a mode of speaking which many pious people regard as being highly objectionable. But, if it is sanctioned by the Bible, we know of no good reason why it should go into disuse. We are warranted, we think, in using this mode of speaking, by all such passages of the word of Inspiration as speak of God's everlasting love to his people. What other meaning can we give to the words of the prophet Jeremiah? 31:3: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." To the same purpose is that sublime declaration of the holy evangelist John, in his Gospel 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Possibly it may appear to some that this expression of the divine Redeemer is repugnant to the idea of God's distinguishing grace, because it represents him as loving the world without any notice of his making any discrimination. But from the concluding words of the verse, it is plain that the blessings of salvation are bestowed upon those only who believe in Jesus Christ. In the last verse of the same chapter it is declared, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." True Christians, in general, though they may not like the word *election*, do feel and will acknowledge that they are by nature no better than the rest of mankind. Each of them is disposed, like Paul, to say, "By the grace of God I am what I am." They all acknowledge that by grace they are saved, but they do not all choose to call it distinguishing grace. Let me ask here, dear brethren, Have any of us made ourselves to differ from those who are still impenitent? Have we chosen God or hath God chosen us? The beloved apostle John, we think, in his First Epistle 4:10, has given a very good answer: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

We observe, once more, that the decrees of God appear, from the sacred Scriptures, to be *sovereign*, *particular*, and *unchangeable*. By divine sovereignty in election, we would be understood as asserting that God does not choose men unto salvation on account of any goodness in them, or from his foresight of their repentance, faith, or Christian obedience; but that, in placing his love upon them and determining to save them, he had no other motive, as far as we can learn from his Word, than his "mere good pleasure," which he exercised according

to "the counsel of his own will." It is implied, also, in this doctrine, that God, in the determinations of his will, is not governed by the will of his creatures, but decrees, chooses, and determines, in an independent and sovereign manner, as becometh the infinitely wise and supreme Ruler of the universe.

Divine sovereignty in election may be evinced by a reference to Romans 9:11, 12, 13. "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto her (Rebecca), the elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." The instance alluded to in these verses presents the doctrine, not only of a sovereign, but also of a particular choice: Jacob and not Esau; the younger, not the elder. Indeed, a choice in every instance must imply some particular object or objects. A choice in any other sense is wholly inconceivable. The election of God is particular with regard to its objects. If it is not to be viewed in this light, it may well be accounted an inexplicable mystery. But, in addition to the instance of Jacob and Esau, we may direct your attention to what the apostle says in 2 Tim. 2:19. "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." These words plainly teach us, that election is to be referred to particular persons, or individuals. The obvious meaning of the words seems to be, that God has his own chosen and peculiar people who are all well known to him, and whom he favors with his gracious regards. Hymeneus and Philetus, it is true, had apostatized, and had corrupted some others; yet the Lord knew all those whom he had chosen and brought into his true church. These he knew and approved as persons distinct from those corrupt apostates. Upon them he fixed his seal, and it was his gracious promise, and his immutable purpose to keep them, by his power, through faith unto salvation, while others apostatized from the *profession* and not from the *possession* of religion.

In view of this comfortable assurance, we think, we are warranted in affirming, once more, that God's decrees and purposes are *absolutely unchangeable*. "He is of one mind," saith Job, "and who can turn him?" "My counsel," saith the Lord, "shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." This divine declaration had a primary reference to the deliverance of the Jews by Cyrus from the Babylonish captivity, but it may, with the same propriety, we think, be applied to all the promises and to all the purposes of God. Especially is it applicable to the gracious purpose of God, which relates to the eternal salvation of his chosen people. The benevolent Redeemer has confirmed this truth in words of great emphasis. Speaking of his own people, his gracious assurances are these: "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 pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." These attestations of the faithful and true Witness ought certainly to be viewed as establishing

the immutability of the divine decrees beyond all reasonable controversy.

This brief and imperfect view of the doctrine of the Bible, relative to the election of God, we submit, beloved brethren, to your candid and impartial examination, and proceed,

II. TO DEFEND THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN ELECTION BY GUARDING IT AGAINST MISCONCEPTION AND ERRONEOUS DEDUCTIONS.

1. The opposers of Calvinism are, we believe, all agreed in representing it to be a necessary consequence of the doctrine of absolute and particular election, that "part of mankind will be saved, do what they will; and the rest damned, do what they can."

No true Calvinist holds this opinion, or ever advanced it, either in preaching or in writing; neither is it a legitimate consequence of the doctrine of absolute election. But, although no denomination of Calvinistic Christians, as far as our knowledge extends, has ever avowed this absurd dogma, or made it, as has been sometimes alleged, a principle of their adopted creed, every controversialist almost, who has written on the opposite side, has imputed it to the doctrine of absolute and particular election, as a plain and necessary consequence of it. But we flatter ourselves that we shall be able to free the doctrine of particular election completely from this serious charge.

"Part of mankind will be saved, do what they will." No, my brethren, we never have avowed this absurd opinion, nor does the Calvinistic scheme, rightly understood, in any sense imply it. It is the doctrine of true Calvinists, that all who believe and are born again, and none others, shall enter the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, they teach that "the unbelieving, and the abominable, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." We not only teach and inculcate these doctrines, but we consider them as *constituent parts*, or branches, of the doctrine of God's electing love. A holy God, we believe, has not decreed to save his people *in* their sins, but *from* their sins. Such a decree would be inconsistent with infinite holiness. In the same purpose of grace by which a merciful God predestinated us to the adoption of children, he likewise predestinated us to be conformed to the holy image of his Son, Jesus Christ. He hath "chosen us to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." These were the principles laid down on this subject by the apostle Paul, and these are the principles held and taught by all true Calvinists. From such premises, is it a just conclusion or a legitimate inference, that the elect will be saved, do what they will? Do such principles imply, that any sinner of Adam's race will ever enter heaven without being born again? Or will it, can it, follow from such doctrines, that God has decreed to admit a part of mankind into heaven, into which his Word assures us no unclean thing can enter, without either conversion, or holiness? Is it not clearly deducible, from all that we find in the Scriptures on the subject of election, that God, in determining to save his chosen people, has appointed faith, conversion, and sanctification, as the proper and

necessary means of its accomplishment. Do not the divine dispensations, pursuant to this gracious ordination, illustrate and confirm this important truth? God the Father has, in his infinite goodness, sent his only begotten Son into the world to save us from our sins; Jesus Christ, in fulfilment of his Father's purpose of mercy, gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity; by the word of his grace he calls us to faith, repentance, and holiness; and the Holy Spirit convinces us of sin, and renews us in righteousness and true holiness. Surely there is nothing in a scheme of which these are the constituent parts, which can at all be construed as favoring an opinion, that any will be saved but the believing and the regenerate. "Except a man be born again, he *cannot* see the kingdom of God."

But what will you say, (some may inquire,) of the non-elect? Agreeably to the principles of Calvinism, will they not inevitably be damned, do what they can? No; we say none will be lost, but those who persist in sin, and die in impenitence. There is nothing in election which lays any necessity upon any sinner to live without God in the world, or to neglect the salvation freely offered in the gospel. Jesus Christ has assigned the true reason why the non-elect will be condemned, where he says; "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." The sinner's unwillingness to forsake his sins and come to Christ as the gospel requires him to do, will be the only cause of his perdition. The depravity of his own heart, not the decree of election, causes him to persist in his evil courses and to neglect his own mercy. Agreeably to the avowed principles of true Calvinists, sinners, who have been favored with gospel privileges, and have misimproved the day of grace and salvation, will stand convicted at the tribunal of Jesus Christ as neglecters of their own mercy. They will, by their sovereign Judge, be sentenced to depart accursed into everlasting fire, not because a decree of fatality had rendered their doom inevitable, but because *they were workers of iniquity*, and voluntarily chose to live "without God and without hope in the world."

Here, then, we might dismiss the subject, but we will further illustrate and confirm our own views.

2. Another difficulty, possibly, may remain in the minds of some pious people, which they would present in the following manner: *Would not the sinner have acted better if God had bestowed upon him converting grace? This, according to your principles, he did not determine to do; consequently, it must still appear, upon the principles of Calvinists, that the poor, unhappy creature was under a fatal necessity of being lost.*

It is, undoubtedly, according to the positive testimony of the Scriptures of truth, the prerogative of a sovereign God to have mercy on whom he will have mercy. Fallible man should not presume to except against the divine procedure, if God has determined to save some sinners by his free and sovereign grace, while he *permits others to follow their own corrupt inclinations, and perish in their impenitency*. It ought to be borne in mind, that *God is under no obligations to confer grace upon any man*, otherwise grace would be no more grace. If God were under obligations to save the elect, there would

be no propriety in saying, as Paul did to the believers of the Ephesian church: "By grace ye are saved." But every true believer knows, and feels, and acknowledges, that his salvation is wholly to be ascribed to God's free and sovereign grace. This he devoutly acknowledges in his prayers. This he delights to make the subject of his songs of praise. In his addresses to the throne of grace, he acknowledges the justice of God, should he condemn him for his many and aggravated iniquities, and places all his dependence upon God's sovereign, free, and undeserved mercy. He feels that, should a sovereign God now withhold that grace which he has so long neglected, he would have no just cause to complain. He does not presume to charge his sovereign Creator with partiality, because he may have bestowed his converting grace upon his neighbor and not upon himself; for he feels conscious that he has been greatly blameable for having neglected the means of grace, in which God has promised to bless him. Let it not be said, then, that the non-elect cannot be saved, because God does not bestow his grace upon them; since it is because *they neglect to meet God where he has encouraged them to expect his blessing.*

3. Here we often meet with another objection: *It is in vain to use means, since our fate, agreeably to your principles, is already determined in the divine decree.* The careless sinner, who cordially hates serious godliness, when he is exhorted by the ministers of Christ, or by his pious friends, to relinquish his sinful practices, and to give his attention to the duties of religion, will often retort and say: "You believe in absolute predestination. You hold that the elect and none else will be saved. If your doctrine be true, it matters not how I live. If I am elected, I shall be saved, let me act as I will; if not, I must perish. I cannot mend the matter by all my endeavors." Similar reasoning has sometimes been absurdly employed by certain misjudging predestinarians, and has, in some instances, been gravely administered as an opiate to lull an awakened conscience. Persons under the salutary pangs of conviction have, by such misjudging friends, been seriously rebuked for suffering themselves to be so needlessly alarmed, and instead of being urged to *close with Christ without farther delay*, as the only method to obtain true comfort, they have been advised to make themselves cheerful, easy, and contented, in their present condition; for God, they are told, is merciful, and if he has so decreed, he will certainly *save* them without this excessive and unnecessary terror and anxiety. Some other good people, too, entertain an opinion that the doctrine of absolute decrees and particular election has a natural tendency to lull those who are dead in sins and trespasses in their sleep of carnal security, to prevent the awakening of the ungodly, and to render professors remiss and formal in religion. Hence, they reject it as a doctrine of most dangerous tendency, and no doubt feel it to be their duty to attack it with most determined opposition.

As these misconceptions have occasioned the deepest prejudices against the doctrine of absolute and particular election, we will endeavor to obviate them as particularly as we can.

We will begin with the sinner, who neglects seeking his own salvation from the consideration, that if he is elected he will certainly be

saved, and therefore he need not give himself any great uneasiness on the subject, or use any great exertions to secure his salvation. But, permit me to ask you, my friend, if your present indifference is not owing to another cause? Your careless life, I am disposed to think, is not so much the effect of a persuasion that your destiny is already fixed, as it is of your love of sin, and your strong aversion to a life of holiness and self-denial. Your strong attachment to sensual indulgences; your carnal motives; and their combined influence in producing your careless mode of life, are very appropriately described by one of the old prophets: "But thou saidst, There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go."

But suffer me to try to prevent your farther revolt by a little plain and familiar reasoning. If you are one who believes in the doctrine of absolute predestination, I take it for granted you believe your *temporal affairs are as much the object of a divine decree, as those matters which relate to your eternal salvation*. You believe, we presume, that you will live just as long as God has decreed that you should, and possess just that *quantum* of worldly goods that he has ordained you should possess.

Now, I ask, how do you act under this persuasion in relation to your temporal interests? But, why do I state the question? I see the industrious farmer plowing his lands, and committing, in due season, his seed grain to the well prepared soil. I behold the laborious tradesman wearing out the day in the business of his shop, and the bustling merchant traversing land and sea to accomplish his schemes of emolument: All as industrious and persevering in their respective occupations, as if it had been revealed to them from heaven that it is the hand of the diligent alone that maketh rich. The children of this world do not reason upon the principles of fatalism and say: "If it is decreed that we shall live, we shall live, whether we endeavor to obtain the means of subsistence or not; or, if it be foreordained that we should be prosperous and wealthy, we shall be rich, whether we use proper exertions to secure the good things of the world or not." In their temporal concerns men never forget, that proper means are necessary to the attainment of important objects. It is no difficult matter to convince them of the necessity of using means in order to acquire a subsistence for themselves and families, or to amass a fortune. They easily believe that it is only the hand of the diligent that maketh rich. Why, then, should man's reason fail to do its office when their spiritual interests are pressed upon their attention? Why should they expect to secure the most important interest, the salvation of their souls, without employing suitable exertions for the attainment of such an important object? Since all things have been planned by a Being of infinite wisdom is it not reasonable to infer that in religion, as well as in other matters, he has established a *necessary connection between the means and the end*, and, therefore, is it not evident, that men cannot, without presumption, hope to be saved, unless they give diligence to make their calling and election sure? "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Let all who are acting upon the absurd principles of fatalism be persuaded to realize

their awful danger. You are in danger of reasoning your precious souls into remediless perdition. By neglecting the means of grace you keep yourselves out of God's way; your Bible lies neglected and gathers dust upon your shelf; your seat in the house of God is usually vacant; your days and nights are passed without prayer, perhaps without any serious thought about the future welfare of your souls. In the mean time, too, probably, your inordinate inclinations are gratified with avidity; your bands are made strong by the society of those who mock at serious godliness; and, in the end, it is to be feared your heart will become totally callous and quite insusceptible of any good impressions. Your careless indifference speaks a language of shocking import. It says to the only Being in the universe that can do you any saving good: "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." May the Lord, in mercy, show you, that the way of stupid carelessness in which you are walking is the broad, sure way to everlasting misery; that there is an indispensable necessity for your seeking God while he may be found, and calling upon him while he is near!

I have yet to expostulate a little with my friends, who very inconsiderately take part with the careless sinner, and insist that the conclusions he draws from the doctrine of particular election are natural and just. Some will tell me, he does not abuse the doctrine; he only carries it out to its legitimate consequences. Did they believe it, they would reason and act just as he does: drop all care about their salvation, and take their share of worldly pleasures and enjoyments. As they consider this to be the native tendency of the doctrine, they renounce it with abhorrence, and oppose it with zeal, as a most pernicious error. Here I see so much prepossession in my way, that I despair of removing it in every instance. Many very good people have been taught to regard particular election as being such a rumous error, and have had their minds so repeatedly stunned *with descriptions of its horrible consequences*, that they are predetermined not to think well of it, or to allow any weight to the arguments by which its votaries esteem it defensible.

With respect to persons who labor under these prejudices, I must in charity believe they have no proper understanding of the doctrine of election, as held by true Calvinists. They do not understand it, because they are not in a state of mind to view it with candor and impartiality. Shall I try once more, my friends, to prevail with you to look at the doctrine of Christian election in the light in which it is held and taught by all true Calvinists, and in which, we think, it is taught in the sacred Scriptures. We believe and teach, that God, in decreeing to save sinners, has included in his plan *the proper means of qualifying them for future happiness*. We teach that, *the elect are "a peculiar people," purified from all iniquity, and "zealous of good works."* They are saved only through "sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth"—"Predestinated unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." I confess I can see in these Scriptural principles and statements, no foundation whatever to expect that any will be saved but the believing and the regenerate; and all such follow holiness, not from fear, but from love. I can see no encouragement for sinners to continue in their impenitence; not the

smallest ground for them to hope that they shall ever reach heaven, unless they will flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them in the precious gospel of Christ. I can discern nothing in these words of truth and grace to lead the impenitent sinner to remissness in the concerns of his soul, or to justify his persisting in his carnal gratifications. You may ask, What can he do if he is predestinated to perdition? But I ask in reply, *how is the sinner to know, according to the word of God, that he will, or will not, be saved, but from his embracing or neglecting the salvation freely offered to him in the gospel of Christ?* A knowledge of his election is no where in the Bible proposed, as a motive to excite the sinner to seek his own salvation. The promises and threatenings of the word of God are the proper motives to a religious life. With such solemn motives pressing him to attend to his duty, and to seek to secure his eternal welfare, what reasonable apology can the sinner plead for wilfully proceeding in the road to destruction? How is he to justify that desperate hardihood with which he is daily posting on to perdition? Does he not sin against God, not only *without his compulsion*, but by his *wilful* rejection of his proffered grace, and in defiance of his tremendous threatenings? He is not influenced, in any respect, by any thing in the divine decrees, to persist in his sinful course of life, or to refuse the grace freely tendered to him. His careless, sinful manner of living, is very aptly described, and accounted for, in one of the emphatical remarks of St. Paul: "But, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Rom. 2:5. With relation to all sinners, who are in this manner hardening their own hearts, we must contemplate their just but awful fate with trembling horror. It is true, we cannot with certainty predict the perdition of the careless, delaying sinner; but we can, and we do, assure him, upon the authority of God, that there is no decree for admitting him to heaven in his present condition. We do solemnly warn him, that if he remains in his present impenitent state, he must certainly perish; that if he will not lay hold on eternal life, he must inevitably sink down into the gulf of despair and eternal death. We also exhort him, in perfect consistency with the doctrine of election, to amend his ways and his doings, and join himself to the Lord in the bonds of his gracious covenant; because, we believe, that if he is elected to salvation, it is in this way that the decree is to be effected. We exhort him to work out his "own salvation with fear and trembling," because "it is God that worketh in him both to will and to do of his good pleasure;" and, because we think, it is the way alone in which he can reasonably hope to make his "calling and election sure."

Now, my brethren, even admitting that some misjudging people make the doctrine of election an apology for their living at present in the neglect of religion, and, according to their own way of speaking, are waiting till God shall, in some extraordinary manner, call and convert them, before they will give their attention to the plain duties enjoined in the word of God, this strange misunderstanding and abuse of the doctrine of God's absolute decree of election is no valid disproof

of that doctrine. If every religious tenet is to be disputed and rejected which has been misconstrued and abused, through the depravity and blindness of the sensual and prejudiced, we will have to renounce the precious doctrines of the gospel entirely.

4. Once more: We sometimes find it objected, that *the doctrine of election tends to discourage the awakened sinner, hinder his application to Christ, and prevent him from finding comfort in the promises of the gospel.*

It discourages the awakened sinner! When I shall have been convinced that the doctrine has this tendency, I will honestly renounce it. I hope I am solicitous to soothe the minds of the awakened by every proper topic of encouragement and consolation. In order to do this successfully, it is necessary to inquire into the cause of the convicted sinner's distress. His alarm and his discouragement arise from a discovery of the number and the greatness of his sins. It is not the doctrine of election that makes him a terror to himself. His discouragements are grounded upon the multitude of his sins, their long continuance, and deep aggravations. Exercises of this nature are needful and salutary, and every teacher of religion should be solicitous to see sinners the subjects of this concern. It is necessary that the sinner should see his sins in their true light; that he should be alarmed at the threatenings of the divine law, and have his proud heart brought down to the dust before a holy God. It is desirable to hear the transgressor confessing his extreme vileness, and acknowledging how justly he might be subjected to everlasting condemnation. When a person is brought to this sense of things, he feels no disposition to cavil at the doctrine of divine sovereignty and absolute election. He can adore and love a sovereign God, and believing he will certainly bestow upon him that grace which he freely offers him, he humbly but confidently approaches him as his Savior, claims his promises, and rests upon his mercy for free pardon and eternal salvation.

These assertions may seem strange to some, but we trust they may be satisfactorily illustrated by a few additional remarks. The terrors of the awakened sinner, as we before observed, are not occasioned by the doctrine of election. This doctrine, rightly viewed, tends to administer encouragement to the subjects of spiritual awakening. The circumstance of their conviction for sin and their concern about their eternal salvation affords rational ground to conclude, that they belong to the number of those whom God hath chosen in Christ, and that the purpose of his grace is about to be happily developed in their conversion. We trace the progress of a work of grace upon the awakened sinner, and finding evidence that he has been brought to sincere penitence and contrition for sin; that he has been enabled to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; is truly born of God, and sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, we can conclude, we think, upon sufficient grounds, that he is one of God's chosen people; nor can we see any thing to prevent the subject of these exercises to come to the same conclusion concerning himself. If awakening be preparatory to conversion, and if God, as we have stated before, has decreed to save sinners by conversion and sanctification, then, we think, the awakened sinner has

ample encouragement, from the very circumstance of his convictions, to conclude that he has been elected of God unto salvation, and that it is, therefore, at once his privilege and his duty, to *press into the kingdom of heaven*.

Christians are under obligations to praise God for a certain, sure salvation. God has made the salvation of his people, not only possible, but sure. In pursuance to the eternal purpose of God's love, Jesus Christ came certainly to save his people from their sins. We are under obligations to bless and praise God that the covenant of his mercy, which he has made with his people in Christ the Mediator, is ordered in all things and sure; that the Mediator is, in every respect, the Savior of all who believe in him, and is both the Author and Finisher of his people's faith. As the great and good Shepherd, he gives his sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand.

A few words in conclusion, to those who are yet strangers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. To you, we would address the appropriate exhortation of the apostle Peter: "Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." The doctrine of election does not preclude the diligent use of the means of salvation. You cannot be saved, continuing in carelessness and impenitence. To sit down at ease, and say you are waiting till God, by a kind of miracle of grace, *shall call and convert you, is a great perversion of the doctrine of his electing love*. If you realized the worth of your souls, and believed that you can only be saved by seeking and obtaining the grace offered in the gospel, surely you could not feel satisfied to live another day without making an effort to "flee from the wrath to come," and lay hold on eternal life. Your duty is to seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near. If you never feel any anxiety about the salvation of your precious souls, and never make any exertions for their salvation, you can never expect, on rational grounds, to be made the subjects of eternal life. If you are chosen to salvation, it is through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. Work, then, O work the work of God, while it is called to-day; the night cometh wherein no man can work. Amend your ways and your doings. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. These are duties, in the neglect of which you cannot hope for salvation; for God has positively ordained, that glory, honor, and immortality, shall be attained only by timely repentance, and patient continuance in well-doing.