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NO. I.

*THE RELATION BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE
WORLD.*

IN order that we may "know what we ought to do," it is necessary for us to possess an "understanding of the times."^{*} Without such an understanding, we cannot rightly estimate the nature and effects of scenes which daily present themselves to our view, and invite our examination. Different events call for the discharge of different duties; and, therefore, it is necessary to know the character of the first, that thus we may rightly perform the last. In this important knowledge, the multitude in Christian lands, at all times, are lamentably deficient, and therefore suffer incalculable mischief in their best interests. They seem, as if by general consent, age after age, to have fallen into two prominent mistakes; which, as they pervert our judgments, always produce disappointment.

The first mistake is, that they view passing events in a light exclusively political; estimating their importance, and calculating their issues, upon principles of political science; which has ever been, and in no age more so than the present, merely a system of expediency; without ascertaining, or even inquiring, how far these principles accord with the word of God. Christians themselves, it is to be feared, forget that *they* have "a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto" they ought to "take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place;"[†] and

^{*} 1 Chron. xii. 32.

[†] 2 Pet. i. 19

under the very altar of the Eternal, to behold the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held. This idea of intermediate and perfect enjoyment of God after death, has smoothed the road of human life to millions of his saints—has thrown the beams of joy over the agonies of death; and will soothe and gladden millions more, until the trumpet shall announce that glorious morn—when the mysteries of the invisible world shall be unfolded—when death shall be swallowed up of life, and time be lost in eternity.

REVIEW.

The Doctrine of Election illustrated and established, in a Sermon, preached on the evening of the second Lord's day in December, 1816, by GARDINER SPRING, A. M. Pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church, in the City of New-York. 8vo. pp. 43. New-York. E. B. Gould. 1817.

UNDER this title the Author introduces, to the consideration of the public, a great variety of the most important theological questions, and pronounces his decision upon them within the limits of little more than two and a half sheets of paper, not very closely printed. It would be unjust to expect from the preacher, within so small a compass, either a display of minute reasonings, or a comprehensive discussion of his doctrines: we have a right to look for no more than a fair exhibition of his subject; scriptural truths stated with precision; a correct arrangement of his ideas; and a style of composition pure, perspicuous, and persuasive. With less than this we will not be satisfied, from any writer who ventures before the public, for their religious instruction, in our good city of New-York.

The *title* which Mr. Spring has chosen for his Sermon, although rather *vague*, may be excused, upon the principle that brevity should be studied in the selection of names; but we cannot, so readily, suggest an apology for the preacher's

omitting to explain, in his Introduction, or to announce, in his arrangement of the parts of his Discourse, *what kind* of an election he designed to *illustrate* and *establish*. The impropriety of leaving us to learn, incidentally, from the progress of his discourse, what was the preacher's object, is in this case the more obvious, because no Christian sect, of whom we have ever heard, deny *every kind* of election taught in the word of God. They all admit, that the Scriptures declare *some kind* of an election to future happiness. They all teach, that God has elected *some persons* to special offices and enjoyments. They all teach, that *certain communities*, such as the Jews, and the Christian Church, were elected to particular privileges; and by far the greater part of professed Christians inculcate the *doctrine* of an election of sinners to happiness and glory, either conditionally or otherwise. Discrimination is necessary upon the part of a preacher who "divides aright the word of truth;" and it would not have been dishonourable to Mr. Spring, had he early and unequivocally avowed himself the defender of the doctrine, that God had absolutely, and from eternity, selected a certain number of fallen sinners to everlasting life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

If it was necessary, at all, to preach and to publish such a Sermon for the purpose of illustrating and establishing "*the doctrine of election*," it was as necessary to declare explicitly from the commencement what is that election: but strange as it may appear, it is not until we arrive at page 33 of this pamphlet of 43 pages, that we are favoured with Mr. Spring's definition of *the doctrine* of election; for, of *election itself*, we have no definition whatever in any page of the pamphlet. It is after employing Head I. of the Sermon, consisting of two parts, one of five, and the other of seven particulars, in explaining his doctrine of election; and Head II. in proving its truth, that we find, subsequently to No. 9. of Head III. the following assertions, concerning *the doctrine* of election.

' It is one of the *plainest* doctrines in all the Bible; it is simply God's determining to save whom he will, and making his own

choice from among this lost world, according to his sovereign pleasure.'

We were happy at finding this definition, however late it occurs, because it conveys an unquestionable truth; and we shall always rejoice in the doctrine of electing love. The definition, it is true, affords not the best specimen of distinctness in conception or precision in expression; for it is both *deficient* and *redundant*; it is deficient, inasmuch as it does not include the idea that election is from eternity, and unconditional of good works; and it is redundant, because the second member is a repetition of the same thought expressed in the first. Mr. Spring is, indeed, a writer whom we by no means charge with close approximation to metaphysical accuracy.

We offer these remarks, upon a comparison of the discourse with its title, certainly with no intention to call in question the soundness of the author's judgment; but for the purpose of paying our respects to him for his ingenious management of means to the end in view, while violating the obvious rules of sermonizing. It is always good policy, in arguing a question in dispute, so to connect the sentiment denied, with an acknowledged truth, as to render it difficult for an opponent to separate them: and it does appear to us, that Mr. Spring constructed and published this Sermon, not *merely* to illustrate and prove even *his own doctrine* of election; but *chiefly*, with design to exhibit, in connexion with it, certain opinions upon various other topics of Christian Theology, which are at present subjects of controversy among those who agree in receiving the doctrine of the predestination of a certain number of the fallen race of man to eternal glory. It is a *fact*, that such topics are introduced in this connexion; and we would not so far impeach the talents of the author for practical skill, as to ascribe the introduction more to accident than design.

In reviewing this Discourse, therefore, we are constrained to advert more to *those other subjects*, than to *that* which is announced in the title-page. Let not our intention be misunderstood. It is not to profound thought; it is not to a brilliant imagination; it is not to scientific accuracy; it is not to co-

piousness or fluency of language, displayed in the composition of a sermon, that we offer any objection. If it were, we would not apply the objection here. It is not to that extent of research, or that comprehension of intellect, which can furnish an abundance of ideas, and bring a variety of lights to bear strongly upon one point, that we object in the pulpit orator: on the contrary, we admire and commend that eloquence, which, with a commanding influence, lays the universe under contribution for the elucidation of divine truth. We have no reason to complain of any thing of this kind in the Sermon under review. It is not a *whole body, with many members joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth*; but (with the exception of the second head) a series of little distinct essays, the principal use of which is to serve as a record of the *opinions* of the preacher upon different important articles of faith. Had those opinions been correct, and expressed with precision and elegance, it would be some compensation for obtruding them unnecessarily in this place; but this is very far from being always the case. The opinions of the writer, although pronounced in a tone of high decision, are generally crudely expressed, are some of them erroneous, and are sometimes inconsistent one with another.

In proof of these remarks, we quote some passages from the Sermon before us.

1. We will give a specimen of what we consider contradictory opinions. "It is a question of great importance in divinity, whether electing love *provides* the atonement of Jesus Christ as one of the means of salvation, or proceeds itself upon the footing of such atonement having been *otherwise provided* for all mankind. Some Divines maintain that election *precedes* atonement; while others teach that, in the counsel of God, atonement *precedes* election."

This is too interesting a question not to occur to a preacher who undertakes to explain the doctrine of election in its connexion with other doctrines. Knowing, as we do, that the different opinions are not only inconsistent the one with the other, but are important parts of two entirely distinct systems

of Theology, we were peculiarly anxious to find on which side of the question the reverend author of the Sermon before us had taken his stand. We find, however, Mr. Spring on *both* sides—Yes, on both sides of the same question. He does not pass by the question without notice; although for such a course of conduct, consistency might have furnished an apology; but he boldly takes his stand, first, on the one side, and then, on the opposite. It was necessary that he should do so. He had business on both sides, or he would not certainly be found there. For, in affirming universal atonement, he could not consistently ascribe it to particular election; and again, he could not recommend the doctrine of election to our love, without referring to it the atonement made for our sins. It was not without necessity therefore, Mr. Spring took, at different times, opposite sides of this question.

First. He represents election as a choice of sinners, for whom atonement has been made, *presupposing* as much the atonement of Christ, as the fall of man.

‘God has provided a *full and complete atonement* for all their sins. The atonement was made, not for the elect or non-elect, as such, but all men as sinners—*some* he saves. There is a *part* he rescues from themselves and from perdition. This number is *definite*. This sovereign and eternal purpose was formed in *view* of the atonement. In view of mankind as *already* plunged in *guilt and ruin*, and of Christ, as making an adequate *atonement*, God *chose* them to salvation.’ pp. 10—13.

Second. On the contrary, Mr. Spring teaches with equal decisiveness, that election *precedes* atonement; and provides not only the atonement, but also him who made it, together with all other mercies and blessings. He describes election as

‘That eternal purpose to which *must be traced* the gift of a Saviour—the offer of mercy. No, not a drop of mercy would have ever fallen upon our desolate world, but for electing love—that we enjoy a day of grace, and the means of salvation, is owing to God’s eternal purpose to rescue from perdition a part of our fallen race. It is against this glorious truth (election) that gives ministers all their encouragement to preach, Christians all their encouragement to pray, and sinners all their encouragement to repent and

believe the gospel, that the seed of the serpent spit out all their venom.' p. 38.

In this part of his Sermon, we take pleasure in finding Mr. Spring on the right side of the question above stated; but when he is good, he is too good. He ascribes, *exclusively*, to election some things, for which we are not willing altogether to neglect the consideration of Christ's death for our redemption. He had told us, page 6, "the doctrine of atonement and election, are two distinct things." And as he declares, in this place, that to *one* of these distinct things, "ministers owe *all* their encouragement to preach, and sinners *all* their encouragement to repent and believe the gospel," the *other* of these distinct things, is entirely excluded. We cannot but consider this exclusion as extravagant; and, for ourselves, we had rather take *some* encouragement, from the cross of Christ, both for our faith and repentance: for we know assuredly, that the apostle Paul derived *some* of his encouragement, in preaching the gospel, from this very source. *I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

Upon the latter part of the above quotation, we have also to make another remark. It is one of Mr. Spring's finest efforts in oratory; and, although the sentiment is not strictly true, it will pass with some readers as an elegant specimen of pulpit declamation. Besides its inaccuracy, in excluding, from the immediate consideration of the pastor and the people, the doctrine of the death of Christ, we deem the conclusion rather unjustly harsh. However decidedly we are ourselves opposed to Arminian tenets, we would not think it becoming to class all men, who disagree with us upon the doctrine of election, among the *venomous seed of the serpent*. The judgment of men's persons and state belongs to God. We think it, therefore, at least indecorous in the preacher, to designate, not only such men as Episcopius and old John Goodwin, but also John Wesley and Adam Clarke, and the great body of respectable men, who are associated, in so many benevolent institutions, along with himself in this city, as "*the seed of the serpent spitting out their venom,*" because they do not recognize his doc-

trine of election. While, with all our talents, we oppose their doctrines, whereinsoever we think them erroneous, we esteem it altogether improper to hold up their persons in such an execrable light, and disgusting attitude, to public detestation—"the seed of the serpent spitting out venom."

The author of the Sermon appears to us to be also self-contradictory in recording his opinions of the extent of the object for which the Redeemer laid down his life.

On this very important question in Theology, he is, at different times, on two different and opposite sides. At one time we are told, that Christ *died equally for all mankind*. At another time, we are told that he died for the *elect* given him in covenant, as, exclusively, the *reward* of his death.

First. He teaches that Christ died for *every sinner of mankind*.

'It has never yet been proved that Christ died exclusively for the elect. If language has any meaning, we are bound to believe that he tasted death for every man. God has provided a full and complete atonement for all their sins. The atonement was made, not for the elect or non-elect, as such, but *all men as sinners*.' pp. 6, 10.

Second. The Preacher, in contradiction of these opinions, teaches that Christ died *for the elect*, given him in covenant, as exclusively the *reward* of his death.

'He (God) does not intend that they shall rob him of his glory, nor his Son of the *reward* of his death. Some he saves. This number is *definite*. He does not sanctify and save one part of mankind rather than another, because one part is *better* than another. The elect are no more worthy of being made the objects of regenerating and *redeeming grace*, than the non-elect. The elect are said to be *chosen in Christ*. In other places they are said to be *Christ's seed*. In others they are represented as *given to him* by his Father. When in the *covenant of peace* he engaged to lay down his life for the sins of the world, a *stipulated number* was given him as his *reward*.' pp. 11, 12, 13.

Now, although there is a *double entendre* in some parts of this quotation, and its connexion in the discourse, it is easy to see that the opinions, uttered in it, are inconsistent with the idea of

Christ's death being equally intended for the benefit of all mankind. Mr. Spring had previously admitted, page 10, that the *effectual application* of the atonement is limited to the elect by the divine purpose; and that, without this, *Christ is dead in vain*. Here he seems to us to admit that the elect are exclusively "the stipulated reward of Christ's death," the only objects of "redeeming grace," for whose salvation alone Christ died. He admits that all this was settled in "the purpose of God," and in the "covenant of peace" with Jesus Christ. It would, moreover, seem to us to follow necessarily, from these admissions, that "they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; neither are any other redeemed by Christ but the elect only. That Christ did in due time die for their sins; and by his obedience and death fully discharge their debt, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf" exclusively.

Mr. Spring himself has, thus, furnished the means of testing the value of "the complete atonement" for which he contends. He has himself described, upon his boundless map of indefinite atonement, lines which limit all the benefits derived from the death of Christ, within definite boundaries; and he pronounces all that is without these limits, to be ineffectual and unprofitable, vain and worthless. If the elect were exclusively the objects of redeeming grace, then there is no redemption for others. If to the elect alone, it was designed from eternity, to restrict the application of Christ's atonement, then there is no atonement in time for the benefit of others. In his death, we are told, Christ had the elect exclusively in view as his stipulated reward. Did he then die for others without any respect to that reward? We are told, however, that he made atonement for all mankind; and also told that it is adequate, full, and complete; and yet we are told that, beyond the limits of the covenant, beyond the limits of election, it is without a drop of mercy, without a spark of grace, ineffectual and vain. It will naturally occur to the reader to ask, for what purpose does Mr. Spring contend for a universal atonement, which he *declares* to be complete, and *proves* to be

nugatory? *Cui bono?* The inquiry is reasonable. Is it for the purpose of glorifying God in the salvation of the elect? No. The redemption of the elect accomplishes that object. Is it for the glory of God in the condemnation of sinners? No. Christ died that sinners might live: and the flames of Tophet ascend from the burning pile to the glory of punitive justice. For what purpose then, is the doctrine of indefinite atonement invented? In order to afford encouragement to ministers to preach the gospel to all? in order to encourage desponding Christians to pray? in order to encourage sinners to repentance or to faith in Jesus Christ? The preacher himself declares, most positively, that it is not. Hear his words, already quoted, referring to the doctrine, not of universal atonement, but of election, for all this encouragement—"this glorious truth—that gives ministers *all* their encouragement to preach, Christians *all* their encouragement to pray, and sinners *all* their encouragement to repent and believe the gospel."

Whatever, however, may be the *design* of urging so vague and vain an idea of atonement for sin, we are apprehensive the *effect* will be a bad one. Of all the various opinions, which have obtained in the Christian world, relative to the object of Christ's humiliation unto death, that which treats his atonement as indefinite, appears to us as calculated to lead most directly to the bold infidelity that entirely denies all atonement for sin. The doctrine of Universalists represents the death of Christ as effecting the salvation of all mankind. The doctrine of Arminians represents the sufferings of the Son of God as partly delivering men from their original sin and inability, to a certain degree of guiltlessness and power. The doctrine of the Bible represents the blood of Christ as actually purchasing the Church of God; but the indefinite atonement represents this precious blood of the everlasting covenant as effecting nothing at all for any *individual* of the human race. Upon the principle of such atonement, we entirely coincide with Mr. Spring, that "Christ is dead in vain," as much as upon the principle to which the apostle Paul referred, when he uttered that expression—as much as upon the principle,

that justification or "righteousness comes by the law." Between an atonement which is altogether vain in itself, and no atonement at all, we are not aware of any important difference. The effect of such representations, upon the minds of mere reasoners, cannot fail to be a belief in the opinion, that the atonement is figurative, and, in reality, nothing.

2. We will, now, make some extracts from the Sermon, in order to show, that the author does not take sufficient pains to express his ideas with due precision. From whatever cause, however, it may come to pass, that an orator is led to speak evasively upon any subject, we must always express our disapprobation of every instance, in which is introduced into the pulpit that figure of speech which is called the *double entendre*, as utterly unbecoming those who are appointed to declare plainly the whole counsel of God. We deeply regret that it so often occurs in the Sermon before us, and we would hope that it was undesigned. For examples, we might quote from many passages; but we confine our remarks to the first part of Head I. In this part of the Discourse, precision was peculiarly necessary, seeing that the preacher's avowed design is to separate, from the doctrine of election, ideas "foreign to the subject." Of these, he enumerates five: and on each, he gives a little dissertation under a title printed in Italics. We follow him in order.

1. '*It is no part of the doctrine of election that God created a part of mankind merely to damn them.*'

This, however, is *not* the proposition which the preacher discusses. Indeed, there was no need of discussion; for every man will admit that damnation is no part of election to eternal life. Mr. Spring's *real* object is to show, that the doctrine itself, "that God created a part of mankind *merely* to damn them," is not true. By playing too, upon the word *merely*, he does injustice to the cause of truth, and leaves the objection, which he would seem to obviate, in all its force: for the objection is not, that God created some men *merely*, but *at all*, in order to damn them.

2. *'It is no part of the doctrine of election, that Christ died exclusively for the elect.'*

This also is evasively stated; for the preacher's object is to show, that the doctrine of *particular redemption* is not true. No one believes that redemption is election. But Mr. Spring has himself elsewhere said, in opposition to his own argument in this place, "that to election must be traced the gift of a Saviour—the descent of the Holy Ghost—the offer of mercy—and the existence of the Church." He hath himself taught, that the elect are, exclusively, "the stipulated reward of Christ's death."

3. *'It is no part of the doctrine of election, that the elect will be saved, let them do what they will.'*

Under this evasive title, the preacher only shows the necessity of sanctification; and yet he will not deny.—1. That the elect shall *certainly* be saved.—2. That they are made, by grace, willing to do good.—3. That they, in fact, *do* what they will.

4. *'It is no part of the doctrine of election, that the non-elect will not be saved, if they do as well as they can.'*

Is it intended, under this evasive proposition, to insinuate, that it is a part of the doctrine of election, that the non-elect shall be saved if they do as well as they can? An election of the non-elect? It is a novel idea in theology.

5. *'It is no part of the doctrine of election, that the non-elect cannot comply with the terms of the gospel.'*

When we came to this last article, we read it with mingled emotions of compassion and mortification. We read it over and over again. We were somewhat surprised, notwithstanding the specimens of crude ideas with which we were previously furnished, that Mr. Spring should rise up, in the name of God, to declare to his fellow-men such a sentiment as this. We thought we heard him saying, "My non-elect brethren, your *inability* is no part of God's *electing love*." Wonderful discovery! Man's wickedness is no part of God's saving grace. We read on, however, and soon found this inability totally disappearing; and lo! the non-elect, unsanctified as they are, appear before us, as *capable of doing good as of doing evil*. But

let us give his own words: they will show his style of writing and of reasoning, even if they do not prove that it is a part of the doctrine of election, that the non-elect *can* keep perfectly the commandments of God. We have not room for the whole paragraph; but we will state the argument.

Our Saviour says, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." His idea doubtless is, that men *cannot* come to Him, *because they are unwilling* to come; for He had just said, "And ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." He *supposes* that *mere* unwillingness renders it *impossible* for them to come.—While, therefore, it is proper to say, that men *cannot* do what they are *unwilling* to do, it is also proper to say, that they *can* do what they are *willing* to do.—Hence it is no perversion to say, that a sinful man can become holy, or that the non-elect can comply with the terms of the gospel. Their *unwillingness* lays them under no natural *inability*—they are as capable of doing right as of doing wrong.' pp. 8, 9.

This argument, whatever may be the intermediate steps, certainly leads to a conclusion very opposite to the premises. The *premises* are the words of our Saviour, "no man can come unto me except the Father draw him:" the *conclusion* is in the words of Mr. Spring—"they (*all men*) are as *capable* of doing right, as of doing wrong." This looks to us very much like a contradiction. But let us see how the *parts* of the argument cohere. Christ "supposes that *mere* unwillingness renders it *impossible* for them to come:" *ergo*, "their unwillingness lays them under no *natural inability*." "It neither picks their pockets, nor breaks their legs." Again, "It is proper to say, that men *cannot* do what they are *unwilling* to do;" *ergo*, it is proper to say the very contrary—"it is no *perversion* to say, the non-elect *can* comply with the terms of the gospel." Such are the intermediate parts of this great argument, illustrated indeed by the happy ideas of an *honest knave* and a *temperate drunkard*. "It is no perversion of language to say, that a knave can be honest, or that a drunkard can be temperate,"—both together, at one and the same time!

We avoid, for the present, entering into any doctrinal discussion of this important theological question; and have only

to add, that reasonings, similar to those of the Rev. Author of the Sermon on election, are not likely to make us relinquish our ancient creed, that man, "by his fall into a state of sin, hath *wholly lost all ability* of will to do any spiritual good accompanying salvation." Seeing that our Saviour taught us that the natural man "*will not come unto him*;" and, again, that "*no man can come to Him*," without divine grace; we will continue to believe that the sinner is both *indisposed* and *disabled*; yea, that "the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed *can be*:" we will continue to reject, as words either without meaning, or absolutely expressive of a false idea, a *natural ability* to do good, which never in fact does any good, and which, indeed, *cannot* either *will* or *do* any thing acceptable to God.

Upon the whole, the Sermon under review, with the exception of a few pages of orthodox doctrine under the 2d head, is a curious tissue of contradictory maxims—of truth and error. It is obviously the work of a theologian not much beyond his noviciate, hasty, zealous, and adventurous. We commend the zeal, while we chasten the imprudence. As we love the man, and see in him many qualities which may be rendered very useful to the Church, we pray sincerely that he may be directed, in time to come, to take his stand only on *one* side of important evangelical doctrines. We love him, too, *disinterestedly*; for we are not conscious that his interest is actually identified with our own; and we are anxious that, notwithstanding the crudeness of his early productions, he may yet live to inculcate a sound and consistent system of religion. He informs us himself, that he has ample *natural ability* to do every thing that is good; and we conclude with the advice, that he would speedily possess himself of *inclination* to be, *whenever* hereafter he mounts the pulpit, always in the right, and never in the wrong.