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# SERMONS ON IMPORTANT SUBJECTS

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SERMON X.

## DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

-- Ephesians i. 45.--

"According as he hath chosen us in him 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."

This lecture was typed in by Vic Johanson.

THE subject of this discourse is the doctrine of election, and in the discussion of it, I shall pursue the following order:

- I. Show what is not intended by this doctrine.*
- II. What is intended by it.*
- III. That it is a doctrine of the Bible.*
- IV. That it is the doctrine of reason.*
- V. Why they are elected.*
- VI. When they were elected.*
- VII. That it is not a partial election.*
- VIII. That there is no injustice in it.*
- IX. That it opposes no obstacle to the salvation of the non-elect.*

*X. That it is the best that could be done for the world.*

*XI. That it does not supersede the use of means for the salvation of the elect.*

*XII. That it is the only ground of encouragement for using means.*

*XIII. How it may be known who are elected.*

### **I. I am to show what is not intended by this doctrine.**

- 1. Not that a part of mankind are to be saved irrespective of their moral character. We are not to suppose that the elect will be saved, do what they may, without regard to their conduct.
- 2. Nor are we to understand by it, that the elect will be forced to heaven against their will.
- 3. Nor that there is any particular provision made in the atonement for their salvation, more than for the salvation of the non-elect.
- 4. Nor that the unconverted elect are any better than the non-elect.
- 5. Nor that the unconverted elect are any more beloved of God, than the non-elect.
- 6. Nor that the non-elect are created for damnation, and cannot be saved do what they may.

### **II. But, by the doctrine of election, is intended,**

that a part of the human family are chosen to eternal salvation; that not only are they chosen as a whole, but as individuals; every one of whom will finally be saved.

### **III. This doctrine is taught in the Bible.**

It is plainly taught in the text. Peter directs his first epistle "to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace be multiplied. Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last times." In 2d Timothy i. 9.--The apostle says, "who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which were given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

I will not take up your time in multiplying passages of Scripture; scarcely any doctrine of the Bible is more abundantly and unequivocally taught than this. Much ingenuity has been exercised in explaining

these passages so as to show that they do not teach election as I have stated it. But the manner in which the attempts to explain this doctrine away have uniformly terminated, has fully demonstrated that it cannot be explained away, and that the doctrine as it lies upon the face of the Scriptures is that contained in the proposition I have stated, viz. that a part of mankind are chosen to eternal life and salvation.

#### **IV. It is the doctrine of reason.**

- This will follow, first, from the foreknowledge of God. God must have foreknown who would and who would not be saved. Dr. Adam Clark attempts to evade the inference of election from the omniscience of God. He says, that God's being omniscient is no more evidence that he actually knows all things that are knowable, than that his being omnipotent proves that he does all things that are doable. His omnipotence, he observes, is under the control of his wisdom, so that he actually does nothing but what his wisdom directs; and that his omnipotence is never exerted only in those cases where wisdom calls it to act; so he maintains, that the omniscience of God, is in like manner under the control of infinite wisdom, and that although he might know every possible thing, yet he actually does know only such things as it is wise for him to know. This argument, if it can be called an argument, hardly deserves an answer. But as it is often relied upon and brought forward as sound and conclusive reasoning, I would only ask in answer to it, How could God know whether a particular thing was best to be known, without a previous knowledge of that thing? It is plain that he must first have a perfect knowledge of it before he could know whether it was wise or unwise to know it.

Peter asserts the foreknowledge of God, by addressing Christians as elect according to the foreknowledge of God. Paul, in the eighth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, says, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren; moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

- Again. If God foreknew whom he would save, he must have had some design about it. He must have designed that they should be saved, or should not be, or that he would have no design about it. It is unreasonable to suppose that he could have had either of the last two; he must therefore have had the first, to wit, that they should be saved.
- Again. If any are to be saved, God must save them--now if he saves them, he either chooses to save them, or chooses not to save them, or chooses to have no choice about it. But it is impossible that he should have no choice about it. It is a contradiction to say, that he knew what would occur, and that he had no choice in relation to the matter.
- Again. The doctrine of election may be inferred from the unchangeableness of God. Suppose ourselves all gathered around the judgment seat, suppose all his saints to be gathered at his right hand, and now the final sentence is to be passed, and now God designs to take all his saints to heaven. But when did God first form this design? Has he any new light on the subject? has he changed his mind? "He is of one mind, and who can turn him?"

- Again. The doctrine of election may be inferred from the fact that with God there is no past or future time, but that all eternity is present time to him. The beginning and the end of time, all the events of time and eternity, past to us, the judgment day and eternity beyond, with all their events, are present to his mind. The name and character and eternal destiny of every creature are present to him, and that is a very unworthy view of God, which exhibits him as having no definite plan in relation to all the concerns of his vast empire; indeed it is virtually denying God, and robbing him of the essential attributes of his nature.
- Again. If God does not know the individuals that will be saved, it is impossible that he should know that any will be saved. If he has designed to save his saints as a body, he must have designed to save them as individuals, for they are made up of individuals.

#### **V. I am to show why they are elected.**

- 1. I remark that it is not because the elect are any better by nature than others. Paul says, "we are called with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which he had in Christ Jesus before the world began."
- 2. Nor because God more strongly desires the salvation of the elect, than of the non-elect.
- 3. Nor because Christ agreed to purchase a part of mankind of the father, and paid down so much suffering for so much sin, and took his choice from among them, as we should from among a flock of sheep.
- 4. Nor because he felt any particular partiality for the elect more than for the non-elect. In short it was nothing in the nature or character of men, that led him to make this distinction, and to choose some in preference to others.
- Nor are we to suppose that God acted in the selection of the elect without motives. He must have had some good and substantial reason for choosing one man in preference to another. Some speak of election in such a manner as to leave the impression on the mind, that God acted arbitrarily, and that the whole turned upon an inscrutable sovereignty the reasons for which we can in no wise understand. But certainly I have not so learned the doctrine of election. For although he has not told us why he has selected one in preference to another, yet he has told us certain things from which we may justly infer what the reasons are which led him to this selection. The Scriptures inform us that God is good, yea infinitely good, and that he doth good; and from the fact that he is infinitely good we are bound to infer that he does all the good he can.
- Moreover he asks, what more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done. If God does not save all men, it must be because all cannot consistently be saved. That the salvation of all men would require such a change in the administration of his government as would upon the whole do more hurt than good in the universe. For if the salvation of all men would upon the whole be wise, most for the glory of God, and for the best interests of his kingdom, we may rest assured that all men would be saved. But it is a matter of fact, that the conversion of all men would require a very different arrangement and administration of the divine government from

that which we now experience, in order to bring sufficient moral influence to bear upon this world, to turn all men to God. It is easy to see also, that this change in the administration of the divine government might in many ways so disarrange the concerns of the universe, of the worlds that roll around his throne, as upon the whole to do more hurt than good. It also follows, that if any part of mankind are saved, it is because God can wisely save them. That in the best possible administration of his government he can bring sufficient moral influence to bear upon them to convert them. It is a contradiction to say that the same amount of moral influence can be brought to bear upon every individual of the human family. It would be the same as to say, that every individual could be in circumstances in all respects, precisely similar. But this is a natural impossibility. The elect then must be those whom God foresaw could be converted under the wisest administration of his government. That administering it in a way that would be most beneficial to all worlds, exerting such an amount of moral influence on every individual, as would result upon the whole, in the greatest good to his divine kingdom, he foresaw that certain individuals could with this wisest amount of moral influence be reclaimed and sanctified, and for this reason they were chosen to eternal life. By this we are not to understand that he foresaw that some men would be better by nature than others, and that because on this account they could be more easily turned to God; but that upon the whole they would be so circumstanced that it would be wise in God, in the administration of his government, to bring sufficient moral influence to bear upon them to subdue their opposition, and to save their souls.

#### **VI. I am to show when the election was made.**

The apostle says it was before the world began, or from eternity. It must have been when the plan of the divine government was settled in his mind, and the present mode of administration concluded upon. Some suppose that men are not elected until they are converted, and confound their election with their conversion. But this is neither reasonable nor scriptural. Christ will say to his saints in the judgment day; "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" and certainly it is unreasonable to suppose that an unchangeable God has changed his mind in regard to an individual, and made a new choice, and elected him to eternal life when he sees that he is converted.

#### **VII. I am to show that this election is not partial.**

By partiality, we understand undue bias or favor towards one individual or party, founded upon some interest or prejudice. Some particular liking we have for one individual more than for others. I have already shown that election does not turn upon any thing in the character of the elect, or any particular prejudice or partiality which God has in their favor. The question of their election did not turn upon any thing in them, but upon the best interests of his government. In electing them, God did not look over the human family to see whom he loved best, but upon whom in the wisest administration of his government he could bring sufficient moral influence to bear to save them. It was no partiality to them, but a high and holy regard to the great interests of his immense kingdom that led to their election.

#### **VIII. I am to show that there is no injustice in this.**

God was under obligation to no one--he might in perfect justice have sent all mankind to hell. The

doctrine of election will damn no one; by treating the non-elect according to their deserts he does them no injustice; and surely his exercising grace in the salvation of the elect is no act of injustice to the non-elect, and especially will this appear to be true if we take into consideration the fact that the only reason why the non-elect will not be saved is because they pertinaciously refuse salvation. He offers mercy to all. The atonement is sufficient for all. All may come and are under an obligation to be saved. He strongly desires their salvation and does all that he wisely can to save them. Why then should the doctrine of election be thought unjust.

### **IX. Election opposes no obstacle to the salvation of the non-elect.**

The choice of some to eternal life, on the ground that they can be converted under the wisest administration of government, is by no means throwing any difficulty in the way of the conversion of the non-elect; for with them God uses all the means that are consistent with wisdom to reclaim and save them. The conversion of the elect, instead of being an obstacle in the way, is a powerful inducement to the non-elect to turn and live. The conversion of the elect, sustaining such relations as they do to the multitudes of the non-elect, is among the most powerful motives that could be presented for the conversion of the non-elect.

### **X. This is the best that could upon the whole be done for the inhabitants of this world.**

It is reasonable to infer from the infinite benevolence of God that the plan of his government includes the salvation of a greater number than could have been saved under any other mode of administration. This is as certain as that infinite benevolence must prefer a greater to less a good. To suppose that God would prefer a mode of administration that would accomplish the salvation of a less number than could be saved under some other mode, would manifestly be to accuse him of a want of benevolence. It is doubtless true that he could so vary the course of events as to save other individuals than he does. To convert more in one particular neighborhood, or family, or nation, or at one particular time, than he does.

Suppose there is a man in this city, who has so strongly entrenched himself in error that there is but one man in all the land who is so acquainted with his refuges of lies as to be able to answer his objections and rout him from his hiding-places. Now it is possible that if this individual could be brought in contact with him he might be converted: yet if he is employed in some distant part of the vineyard, his removal from that field of labor to this city, might not on the whole be most for the interest of God's kingdom; and more might fail of salvation through his removal here, than would be converted here by such removal. God has in view the good of his whole kingdom. He works upon a vast and comprehensive scale. He has no partialities for individuals, but moves forward in the administration of his government with his eye upon the general good, designing to convert the greatest number, and produce the greatest amount of happiness within his kingdom.

### **XI. Election does not supersede the necessity of means for the conversion of the elect.**

They are chosen to salvation through the sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth. They must then hear, believe, and obey the truth. If the end is to be accomplished, the necessary means must be used: would a farmer, because he knew that God had settled it in his own mind whether he should

have a crop or not, say that if he was to have a crop he would have it, whether he sowed his land or not? Would a sick man neglect to use means for the recovery of his health, because he knows that God has numbered his days, and that it was settled in the divine mind whether he would die or not? Certainly not. If the farmer is to have a crop, he must sow his field and use the necessary means. So if the sick man is to live, the means requisite for his recovery must be used. So in the cure of sinners, if means be not used, not even the elect can be saved, and those that neglect the means will never make their calling and election sure.

## **XII. The doctrine of election affords the only ground for encouragement in the use of means for the salvation of sinners.**

Knowing as I do that the carnal mind is enmity against God; that men are utterly opposed to the way of salvation; that they hate the Gospel, and all the efforts that are made to save them; what encouragement should I have to preach the Gospel, were it not that I know that God has chosen some to eternal life, and that many or all my hearers may be of this number; and that his providence has collected you here, with a design to reach you with the arrows of his truth. It is this consideration alone that can afford any ground for encouragement to hold forth in your heaving the word of life.

## **XIII. I am to show how it may be known who are elected.**

Those of the elect that are already converted are known by their character and conduct. They demonstrate the reality of their election by their obedience to God. Those that are unconverted may settle the question each one for himself whether he is elected or not, so as to have the most satisfactory evidence whether he is of that happy number. If you will now submit yourselves to God, you many know that you are elected. But every hour you put off submission, increases the evidence that you are not elected.

## **INFERENCES AND REMARKS.**

I. Foreknowledge and election are not inconsistent with free agency, but are founded upon it. The elect were chosen to eternal life, because God foresaw that in perfect exercise of their freedom, they could be induced to repent and embrace the Gospel.

II. You see why many persons are opposed to the doctrine of election, and try to explain it away; 1st they misunderstand it, and 2d. they deduce unwarrantable inferences from it. They suppose it to mean, that the elect will be saved at all events, whatever their conduct may be; and again they infer from the doctrine that there is no possibility of the salvation of the non-elect. Their understanding of the doctrine would be an encouragement to the elect to persevere in sin, knowing that their salvation was sure, and their inference would drive the non-elect to desperation, on the ground that for them to make efforts to be saved would be of no avail. But both the doctrine, as they understand it, and the inference are false. For election does not secure the salvation of the elect irrespective of their character and conduct; nor, as we have seen, does it throw any obstacle in the way of the salvation of the non-elect.

III. This view of the subject affords no ground for presumption on the one hand, nor for despair upon

the other. No one can justly say, If i am to be saved, I shall be saved, do what I will, Nor can any one say, if I am to be damned, I shall be damned, do what I will. But the question is left, so far as they are concerned, as a matter of entire contingency. Sinners, your salvation or damnation is as absolutely suspended upon your own choice, as if God neither knew or designed any thing about it.

IV. This doctrine lays no foundation for a controversy with God. But on the other hand it does lay a broad foundation for gratitude, both on the part of the elect and the non-elect. The elect certainly have great reason for thankfulness that they are thus distinguished. Oh what a thought, to have your name written in the book of life, to be chosen of God an heir of eternal salvation, to be adopted into his family, to be destined to enjoy his presence, and to bathe your soul in the boundless ocean of his love forever and ever. Nor are the non-elect without obligations of thankfulness. You ought to be grateful if any of your brethren of the human family are saved. If all were lost, God would be just. And if any of your neighbors or friends, or any of this dying world receive the gift of eternal life, you ought to be grateful and render everlasting thanks to God.

V. The non-elect often enjoy as great or greater privileges than the elect. Many men have lived and died under the sound of the gospel, have enjoyed all the means of salvation during a long life, and have at last died in their sins, while others have been converted upon their first hearing the Gospel of God. Nor is this difference owing to the fact that the elect always have more of the strivings of the Spirit than the non-elect. Many who die in their sins appear to have had conviction for a great part of their lives; have often been deeply impressed with a sense of their sins and the value of their souls, but have strongly intrenched themselves under the refuge of lies, have loved the world and hated God, and fought their way through all the obstacles that were thrown around them to hedge up their way to death, and have literally forced their passage to the gates of hell.

VI. Why should the doctrine of election be made a stumbling block in the way of sinners. In nothing else do they make the same use of the purposes and designs of God, as on the subject of religion; any yet in every thing else God's purposes and designs are as much settled and have as absolute an influence. God as certainly designed the day and circumstances of your death as whether your soul shall be saved. It is not only expressly declared in the Bible, but is plainly the doctrine of reason. What would you say on going home from meeting, if you should be called in to see a neighbor who was sick, and on inquiry you should find he would neither eat nor drink, and that he was nearly starved to death: on expostulating with him upon his conduct, he should calmly reply, that he believed in the sovereignty of God, in foreknowledge, election, and decrees; that his days were numbered, that the time and circumstances of his death were settled, that he could not die before his time, and that all the efforts he could make would not enable him to live a moment beyond his time. If you attempted to remonstrate against his inference, and such an abuse and perversion of the doctrine of decreed, he should accuse you of being a heretic, of not believing in divine sovereignty. Now should you see a man on worldly subjects reasoning and acting thus, you would pronounce him crazy. Should farmers, mechanics, and merchants reason in this way in regard to their worldly business, they would be considered fit subjects for bedlam.

VII. How forcibly the perversion and abuse of this doctrine illustrate the madness of the human heart, and its utter opposition to the terms of salvation. The fact that God foreknows and has designs in regard to every other event, is not made an excuse for remaining idle or worse than idle on these

subjects. But where their duty to God is concerned, and here alone, they seize the Scriptures and wrest them to their own destruction. How impressively does this fact bring out the demonstration that sinners want an excuse for disobeying God, that they desire an apology for living in sin, that they seek an occasion for making war upon their Maker.

VIII. I have said that the question is as much open for your decision, that you are left as perfectly to the exercise of your freedom, as if God neither knew nor designed any thing in regard to your salvation. Suppose there was a great famine in this city, and that John Jacob Astor alone had provisions in great abundance, that he was a benevolent and liberal-minded man, and willing to supply the whole city with provisions free of expense, and suppose there existed a universal and most unreasonable prejudice against him, insomuch that when he advertised in the daily papers that his store-houses were open, that whosoever would might come and receive provisions, without money and without price, they all with one accord began to make excuse and obstinately refused to accept the offers. Now suppose that he should employ all the cartmen to carry provisions around the city, and stop at every door. But still they strengthened each others hands, and would rather die than be indebted to him for food. Many had said so much against him that they were utterly ashamed to feel and acknowledge their dependence upon him. Others were so much under their influence, as to be unwilling to offend them, and so strong was the tide of public sentiment, as that no one had the moral courage to break loose from the multitude and accept of life. Now suppose that Mr. Astor knew beforehand the state of the public mind, and that all the citizens hated him, and had rather die than be indebted to him for life. Suppose he also knew from the beginning that there were certain arguments that he could bring to bear upon certain individuals that would change their minds, and that he should proceed to press them with these considerations until they had given up their opposition, had most thankfully accepted his provisions, and were saved from death. Suppose he used all the arguments and means that he wisely could to persuade the rest, but that notwithstanding all his benevolent efforts they adhered to the resolution and preferred death to submission to his proposals. Now suppose he had perfect knowledge from the beginning, of the issue of this whole matter; would not the question of life and death be as entirely open for the decision of every individual as if he knew nothing about it.

IX. Some may ask why, does God use means with the non-elect, provided he is certain they will not accept? I answer because he designs that they shall be without excuse. He will demonstrate his willingness and their obstinacy before the universe. He will rid his garments of their blood; and although he knows that their rejection of the offer will only enhance their guilt and aggravate their deep damnation, still he will make the offer, as there is no other way in which to illustrate his infinite willingness to save them, and their perverse rejection of his grace.

Lastly, God requires you to give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. In choosing his elect, you must understand, that he has thrown the responsibility of their being saved upon them, that the whole is suspended upon their consent to the terms; you are all perfectly able to give your consent, and this moment to lay hold on eternal life. Irrespective of your own choice no election can save you, and no reprobation can damn you. The spirit and the bride say Come, let him that heareth say Come, let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the waters of life freely. The responsibility is yours. God does all that he wisely can, and challenges you to show what more he could do that he has not done. If you go to hell, you must go stained with your own blood. God is

clear, angels are clear. To your own master your stand or fall; mercy waits, the Spirit strives; Jesus stands at the door and knocks; do not then pervert this doctrine, and make it an occasion of stumbling till you are in the depth of hell.