

ETERNAL ELECTION ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION

A SERMON

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“Because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation.” 2 Thessalonians
2:13

THE saints of God in all ages have seen and felt that absolute, eternal election in Christ Jesus was one of the foundation truths of their eternal welfare; and therefore, their names being written in heaven was one cause, connected with many more causes, of their gratitude to God. We have, while in this world, many, many, many things to be thankful for; both for the mercies we have direct from the Lord, and for the mercies we have by means of the brethren, or sometimes also of our fellow-creatures. I feel this morning, when I look back a few days to the bereavement the Lord has called me to undergo, and which of course I cannot easily forget; yet I do feel that I should be wanting in respect to you, I feel I should be wanting in gratitude to you, if I did not this morning sincerely, in the sight of the Lord, acknowledge the great kindness that you have showed to me under that bereavement, and the kind and well written letters which I have received, and every expression of sympathy which you have shown. It has been to me a very great source of support and comfort; it has brought out some of your best feelings; and I cannot forbear naming that it was no small pleasure to me to find that every one of the deacons made a sacrifice and joined with me in following to the grave the mortal remains of my departed child. And I do hope that the kindnesses which you have shown to me under this, as well as under former circumstances of trouble. whatever those troubles have been, I do trust that this will devote me more and more to your welfare; I do pray that it may increase me in prayer to God and in love to God, and that I may feel that I am laboring among a people that do appreciate my humble services. I assure you, friends, I have a very low estimate of my own labors; I see so many drawbacks, and feel so many infirmities, that if my labors be at all appreciated, it cannot be because of any excellency in the laborer, it must be because the Lord is pleased to make use of a piece of clay, to make use of an earthen vessel to the blessing of others, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. And after all, the bereavement I have been called to undergo is, when I think it over, the Lord's mercy, in every way his doing. It is nothing in comparison with what some of you have been recently called to undergo. You have undergone, some of you, bereavements more heartrending; and I do desire to sympathize with you, and to feel for you, and to pray with you that

you may have grace to say. "The will of the Lord be done." We have two of our members lying dead at this time, whom I have to bury in the coming week; one that heard the truth here in her youth, whom I buried last Monday, the wife of a Christian brother now present. She was, through affliction, confined to her home for twenty years and yet, during that whole twenty years the Lord carried on his work in her heart; she continued to hold fast the truth, and continued to enjoy a little comfort from time to time from the truth. She was one of those timid and fearful ones that never seemed to reach that full assurance she could wish to have; but she abode in the truth, and as she drew near her end the fear of death fled from her, and she died in that peace that passes all understanding. May the Lord make this bereavement a blessing to the surviving children, who very deeply feel their loss of such a mother; and if there be a person upon earth that will give disinterested and sincere advice to children, it is a mother. Well might David use that figure when he says, "I bowed down heavily, as one that mourns for his mother. In all ages right-minded children have appreciated the advice both of the father and of the mother, and the Lord has always put honor upon such. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God has given you." It is, says the apostle, the first commandment with promise. And thus, friends, it is our mercy, however trying some of these circumstances may be, that the Lord will overrule them for our good. Now I was reminded of these things not only by circumstances that exist, but by that with which our text stands connected. "We are bound to give thanks." And the time will come when we shall see things in such a light as to be bound to give thanks even for those things that at present rend, as it were, our hearts in twain. I am sure the poet is right when he said:

"From all their afflictions his glory shall spring;
The deeper their sorrows, the louder they'll sing."

I purpose this morning, then, friends, to dwell upon that which has been one cause, as I have said, among many others, of gratitude to God: namely, our eternal election of God. I shall not this morning attempt to prove that election is a Bible doctrine, but I shall deal with it this morning as a truth which is admitted among us. But before I enter into the doctrine of election, upon which I wish this morning to dwell almost exclusively, I would just make a remark or two upon the existence of evil. First, how are we to deal with the doctrine of the lost? How are we to deal with fallen angels, lost men? First there is the solemn truth that angels fell, and we see no hope held out that they will ever be delivered. Secondly, there is the solemn truth that some will be lost, called vessels of wrath, that will be found at Christ's left hand, and that must go away, under the dreadful sentence, into everlasting punishment. Now everyone thinks within himself, when he thinks at all, If I were God, I never would have permitted angles to fall. Why suffer the creatures that he had created to be unhappy? If I were God, I would never have suffered all nations to walk in their own way, and sin and Satan to gain such ascendancy, and such vast numbers of the creatures I had created to be cast into hell, and to be eternally unhappy. How shall we deal with this? In this way. First, admit the existence of the solemn facts; in the second place, acknowledge that there may be, in the infinite mind of God, deep reasons for his suffering the fall of angels, and for his suffering the perdition of man; there may be deep reasons which we cannot fathom. God has nowhere explained the reason. Let us with reverence acknowledge the solemn facts, but never attempt to explain the real, hidden reason. These facts have been and are revealed; there stand the facts, and there are, no doubt, mysterious reasons in the infinitely deep mind of the great God which he has not revealed. And so, the things that are revealed belong unto us; but those things which are secret,

secret things, belong unto God. That is the way, I think, we must deal with those solemn facts; just observing that when the saints arrive home to glory, if it be needful they should know the reason why God permitted the fall of angels and man; if it be needful they should know the reasons, God will reveal them; and if he does not intend to reveal them, he will make his people content not to know them, for there will be a perfect acquiescence in the will of God then. There is no explanation I have ever heard that gives the least satisfaction to my mind. Let us, therefore, admit the existence of the judgments, that the judgments are an unfathomable deep; and let it be our concern to know whether we have any reason to believe that we are a part of that happy number whose judgment is taken away, whose enemy is cast out, who are brought to mercy's seat, and are vessels not of wrath, but of mercy.

I now proceed, then, to notice this great truth of election, and I enter upon it with great pleasure. I notice, first, *the necessity of it*; second, *the righteousness of it*; third, *the certainty of it*; fourth, *the publicity of it*; and fifth, *that we cannot serve God scripturally without it*.

First, then, I notice *the necessity of it*. And here I shall have every Christian on my side. I appeal now to you that know your own heart, that know what your Adam fall is, and that you are by that fall altogether corrupted; that you have not done good, and that there is no good in you; that you are by nature a sinner, and nothing but a sinner. And the Lord says, for we must take it as his word, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?" What will your language be? You will say, in the sight of God, and every Christian has his solemn times, his times of reflection before God, when no eye sees him but God; and the Christian says, Lord, here I am, a poor, infidel, impenitent, filthy, wretched, corrupted worm of the earth; and if it be not lawful for you to do what you will with your own, if your own mercy had not been sovereignly, freely, and entirely at your own command, I feel as sure as I do of my own existence, that if that mercy had waited for only one good thought or good wish in me, it never would have found it, and I must have been a lost man. I feel as sure as I do of my own existence, that if your mercy had not reached me simply, entirely by your own good pleasure, it never could have reached me at all. It is lawful for you to do what you will with your own. Here am I, a guilty, helpless sinner, and you have been pleased to look upon me in mercy, in loving-kindness, while you were under no obligation to do so, and I had no right to a single particle of mercy, I had no right to a single particle of grace. And if I come and pass over from the Adam fall to the law of God, that law is as spiritual as I am carnal, and I am as carnal as that law is spiritual, I am as sinful as that law is righteous, I am as deceitful as that law is upright, I am as crooked as that law is straight, I am as loathsome as that law is lovely, and, therefore, for me to do a single thing for that law to approve is an utter impossibility. So that if you had not been pleased of your own good pleasure to have mercy upon me, I never could have had mercy at all. Now, my hearer, is your experience such that you can join in this testimony, and that your language is, "Thanks be unto him that remembered us in our low estate" not, Thanks to ourselves that remembered him, but "Thanks be unto him that remembered us in our low estate for his mercy endures forever." Ah, then, is my name inscribed in God's eternal book? Nothing, no, not my personal experience, is clearer to me than that grace alone could put my worthless name there. Is my name inscribed upon the breastplate of the High Priest? I am sure, if it is there it was because the Lord was pleased to show this mercy and put my name there. Is my name found upon the shoulder-pieces of the Great High Priest? Then I am as sure as I am of my existence that mercy must have put my name there. Is my name graven upon the palms of his hands? Is my name graven among the twelve tribes of Israel upon the gates of the celestial city? Oh, if my name be in all these

respects written in heaven, then my existence is not clearer to me than the fact that the mercy of God has done this, and my heart is prepared to say, "Not unto me but unto your name be all the glory." And remember further, while you thus learn from experience your need of the Lord's sovereignty, your need of his doing what he will with his own, you will also observe that no election, no salvation. "He has chosen you to salvation." No salvation, no sanctification, no setting apart, no sanctification, no vocation; and if no vocation, then no justification; if no justification, then no glorification. And that you will find that election is one, I say, of the foundation truths of our eternal welfare. Ah, my hearer, what is your experience? Do you from day to day mourn before the Lord, and do you see yourself in such a light, and see and feel yourself, even as a Christian, to be so fruitless as to fear that after all he will come some day and cut you down as a cumberer of the ground? What will be the result? Why, when the Lord says, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?" you will say, Yes, Lord; yes, Lord; for if it were not so, mercy could never come to me. It has come to me; I have a hope in your mercy, and I love your mercy, and the way of your mercy, and the testimony of your mercy, and the order of your mercy, and the design of your mercy. Here, then, you will rejoice, and you will reflect, and say, Well, then, if the Lord is pleased thus to love me, who can say no? He can do as he pleases. If the Lord is pleased thus to inscribe my name in his eternal book, who can say no? He can do as he pleases. If the Lord is pleased to blot out by his dear Son all my sins, and not remember one against me, who can hinder him? He can do as he pleases. If the Lord is pleased to pass by my innumerable sins, and to hold me in his dear Son free from all, love me, and take care of me, and keep me as the apple of his eye, who can say no? He can do as he pleases. Thus, then, friends' true humility before God will bring the creature to nothing, and let the Lord be all in all. If this be my experience, personal experience, which it is, and the experience of hundreds of you as well, how can we make light of electing mercy? How can we make light of electing grace? How can we make light of the sovereignty of God, if one of my sins can bring him into bondage, and hinder him from doing as he pleases? But my glory is that election is free, that redemption is eternal, that vocation is effectual, and glorification eternally sure. Thus then, the necessity of this originates in three things. First, our Adam-fallen condition, having thereby rendered ourselves unworthy, lost all that we had, and rendered ourselves unworthy of the least of the Lord's mercies. Second, that by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified. Those are two things that render election necessary. And the third is that which I wish you to take very careful notice of. Adam, before the fall stood on creation's ground. Adam never had any right to that life, that lofty, that divine life we have in Christ. Adam never had any right to that paradise that is above. Adam never had any right to that eternity of glory that Jesus has reached, and that Jesus possessed, and to which he will bring his people. Then, if unfallen man had no right to, and never could have reached, those lofty regions, how shall fallen man reach them, unless election take him up, and give him into eternal oneness with him that has reached those regions and that does possess the inheritance, and that has entered into the joy.

Here, then, take those three things; first, your fallen condition as an Adam sinner; second, your condemned condition as a law sinner; and third, that the things which are by Jesus Christ are supernatural, and as superior to what Adam had by creation as the person of Christ is superior to the person of Adam. The necessity of election. Not a soul was ever saved without election, nor ever will be, for as in the beginning, so at the end, "whosoever's name was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Perhaps I have said enough for the present to show the necessity of the sovereignty of God, or of election.

I notice, secondly, *the righteousness of this election*. Do you murmur at it? Do you complain of it? Are you offended with it? I will tell you what the answer is. The answer of election to you is, "Friend, I do you no wrong?" The Lord, in having mercy upon one sinner, does not thereby wrong the other sinner. The Lord, by calling Abraham, did not wrong anyone else. The Lord, by sovereignly constituting Isaac, and not Ishmael, the child of promise, did no wrong to Ishmael. The Lord, in loving Jacob, did no wrong to Esau. The Lord, when he opened your eyes, did no wrong to your neighbors. Your neighbors, those that you know, are still where they were, and where you would have been still if Almighty mercy had not called you by his grace. So, it is righteous because it does no wrong to anybody. Election does an infinity and an eternity of good, but it does no one any wrong, unless you can prove that it is not lawful for the Lord to do what he will with his own. And when men tell you that this doctrine of election has a bad practical tendency, my advice to you is to take no notice of that. We have nothing to do with what men say, we have to do with the Word of God. And if the dear Savior treats of election, gives a peculiar tone to the whole gospel, treats of the gospel after this order, 6th of John, and the people go away, and walk no more with him, would you blame the Savior because their carnal hearts rose in enmity against God's sovereignty? But the doctrine leads to all manner of evil. That is the assertion of man; I will now give you the testimony of God. What sort of a man do you reckon Saul of Tarsus? Why, say you, a very wicked man; persecuting the saints of God; haling men and women to prison; employing all his powers to put them to death. Very well, what sort of a man do you call Paul the Apostle? Why, say you, with the exception of Jesus Christ, as good a man as ever lived. And pray, how did he become such a good man? Answer, election got hold of him; "The God of our fathers has chosen you," "He is a chosen vessel unto me," "chosen you that you should know his will, and see that just One, and should hear the voice of his mouth?" What is the result? When election got hold of him, it led him into all manner of good; he became devoted to God. When electing grace had got hold of him, his language was, "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God?" What have I to do with what men say? I have to do with what God says. And some of you that were profligates, drunkards, and thieves, too, for aught I know, by the sly at least; you cheated when you could, and that is a genteel way of thieving; but you are not any of that now, since electing grace has taken hold of you. Electing grace has taken hold of you, has chosen you out of the world, and you are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world; you are become yoked to him. And you can bear testimony, then, first, of the necessity of it; second of the righteousness of it, because it does not wrong anybody, and that it never made one man worse yet, but it has made millions untold millions, infinitely better than they ever were till electing grace took hold of them. Thus, then, the necessity of it and the righteousness of it; righteous because no one has any right to it; righteous because the great God is fully at liberty, seeing we have forfeited all right, he is fully at liberty to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens.

Thirdly, *the certainty of this election*. Adam was chosen as the head of the human race; he was put upon a certain footing, lost his standing, and the blessed God could not, in accordance with that order of things into which he had put the first Adam, continue with him in Paradise; he had lost it. But here, in Christ Jesus, Jesus Christ was put upon a certain footing; he was made under the law; did he ever violate that law? He was made under the curse; did he not wear out that curse? Did he not suffer, suffer, suffer, and suffer, until there was no more to suffer? He came under our sins;

could our sins defile him, or make him stagger or stop? Ah! did he not, notwithstanding the infinite burdens upon his shoulders, rejoice as a strong man to run a race? He reached the goal, and gained the prize, obtained the victory, tore the territories of hell to pieces, stood upon the ruins, looked back with satisfaction, sees with satisfaction the travail of his soul, and now he stands in possession of an eternal inheritance, his right never to be invalidated. If then, you are chosen in him, he is your assurance, he is your stability, he is your representative, and his right is your right, his welcome is your welcome.

“One with Jesus, by eternal union one.”

So, with the Jews, the Lord could not, in keeping with the footing upon which he had placed them, continue them in Canaan. But he can, in keeping with the footing upon which he has placed his people, continue them in Christ. “Blessed with all spiritual blessing in Christ.” He will not behold iniquity in them that are in Christ, nor see perverseness in them that are in Christ. Here is the certainty. And then, in the third place, upon this matter of contrasting certainties with uncertainties, consistently with God’s holy law, we cannot continue long in this life. We must die, the body must mingle with the dust; come to nothing we must. But in Christ we never die. “He that believes in me,” that has life in me, “shall never die.” Jesus says, “Believe you this?” There is no dying there; as there is no breaking in, there is no going out there. Ah! then, though the days of our pilgrimage here be short, our days in Christ are eternal days; though our days here be clouded, there we shall have unclouded skies, our sun will always shine. The necessity, then, of election, the righteousness of election, and the certainty of election. And we may well appreciate the certainty of it. But if you take election away, where is the certainty of the gospel then? There is no certainty. Blessed, with all spiritual blessings, according to this election in Christ Jesus. There is one remark made by men that I must not pass by, because coming to Christ it requires an answer; and it is this, that election discourages sinners from coming to Christ. “I have known,” says a Wesleyan writer, “men that have been very pious and very zealous; but when they have heard of election, they given up their religion, and away they have gone.” This writer, Nelson, I believe his name is, his object was to blame election. I thought when I read it, of the pious people that followed the Savior in the 6th of John, and as soon as they heard his discourse they went back and walked no more with him. This is how I get out of that. But what is my answer? Election discourages sinners from coming to Christ, discourages sinners from striving; for says the poor sinner, if I am not one of the elect, it is no use for me to strive. I have but one answer; I never could find but one answer, and that one answer is enough for me, and I hope it will be for you; and what is that? My answer to all that is this, that the language of electing grace is, “Him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out.” If you are willing to receive that, it is willing to receive you. There rests the matter. Look at that, poor sinner. Now come, my Wesleyan friends, some of you here this morning, look at that; you see we high Calvinists are not so hard-hearted and narrow-minded as you think; you see we throw the gate wide open. The language of election is, “Him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out.” Have you, then, staggered at election heretofore, and do you now see it written over the gate of sovereignty, “Him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out”? Ah, say some, I would sooner have Jesus Christ without election. But you cannot; you cannot have him without election. You must receive him as the chosen head of a chosen people; and you cannot have election without him. If you think you can have Jesus Christ without election, shall I show you what you are like? You are like the trees that wanted the olive tree to come and reign over them and leave the oil of grace behind; that wanted the fig tree to come and reign over them, and leave the sweetness behind,

the good fruit and sweetness behind by which they honored God and man. And they said to the vine, "Come you and reign over us." But "Shall I leave my wine, which cheers God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?" And therefore, you must have him in his relation, you must have him in God's order of things. So, then, the language of election is, "Him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out." Does not this answer every quibble? And Christ is the embodiment of all the truths of the gospel, and Christ there speaks as the representative of every gospel truth, and what he says is the language of every gospel truth, "Him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out." Ah, I hear one of you saying, I never will come to that election. You won't come? No; I won't come to that. Well, then, my prayer for you is, that the Lord may deal with you as he did with some we read of. What is that? "Go, work in my vineyard." What, that free-grace vineyard? What, that vineyard the Lord does not let out, but keeps in his own hands, and waters every moment, and keeps it night and day, that election vineyard? I won't go. But he afterwards repented and went. Go you and do likewise. "Bound to give thanks to God, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation." Thus, then, I have noticed the necessity of it, the righteousness of it, and the certainty of it.

But fourth, *the publicity of it*. I suppose with that thought I must close. I meant to have added the other, but we may have an opportunity of doing that in future. The Lord has never attempted to make a secret of election; the Lord made no secret of choosing Abel and not Cain; the Lord made no secret of choosing Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not Ishmael nor Esau; the Lord made no secret of choosing one nation, and bringing one nation from the midst of another nation; he made no secret of it, and wherever they went into captivity, the Lord made no secret of his sovereign mercy to them. In Babylon fiery furnaces and lions' dens must give way before them; in Persia the mighty Haman must fall, Mordecai must rise, the people be delivered. God made no secret of this election. And when David was about to die, David made no secret of this election. I admit he there speaks of subordinate elections, but they are all illustrative of the one great act of eternal election to eternal life and eternal salvation. He says, "The Lord God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father to be king over Israel for ever; for he has chosen Judah to be their ruler; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father; and among the sons of my father," David says, "he liked me to make me king over all Israel; and of all my sons he has chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne." He made no secret of it. And so, the Savior made no secret of it, 17th of John, it was not to be put under a bushel any more than the 1st of Ephesians; 9th of Romans made no secret of it. And the Savior preached it everywhere; made no secret of it. And he will make no secret of it at the last day, at the end of time; he will acknowledge that he is then in possession of the very people that were given to him before time, the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. Well, say you, he told them to go and preach the gospel; he did not say, Go and preach election. I hope you do not attach the slightest importance to that; that is a mere quibble, because you have nothing better to say. You must see at once the weakness of that objection, because, if you use that as an argument, that the apostles were not to preach election, then, you know, the same argument will apply that they were not to preach anything else definitely, for the Savior did not say, Go and preach eternal salvation; he did not say, Go and preach regeneration; he did not say, Go and preach eternal redemption; he did not say, Go and preach eternal life; he did not say, Go and preach everlasting love. But he did say, "Preach the gospel;" and that gospel embodied everything. And I think I have shown to those of you that have eyes to see, pretty clearly, that election is an essential part of the gospel; that we know the necessity of it, and the righteousness of it, and the certainty of it, and the publicity of it. I would it were ten times more preached than it

is; not in a dry, argumentative way, but as a transaction that gives a peculiar tone to all the truths of the gospel. I know some men, low-doctrine men, say, Well, sir, election ought to be used very moderately; just as you would sugar in tea. But unhappily, that argument proves too much, for when I taste my tea and there is no sugar, I find it out in a minute. I do not happen to be one of those dyspeptics that can take no sugar in their tea; I like a good lump. You admit it is sugar, then, and that sugar diffuses itself all over the cup of tea, so that none of it escapes the sugar. And so, no gospel truth escapes election; it gives a tone to the whole. When you attempt to take the brazen sea down from its divinely authorized pedestal and rest it upon the pavement of creature effort or creature doing, upon the ground of poor old Adam nature, ah, then you spoil the whole tone of the gospel. I say I would, then, it was ten times more preached than it is. What gave superiority to the Scotch over the Irish? they were originally one. Calvinism. What has given such stamina to England? Calvinism. What will keep up its stamina? Calvinism. And what were the martyrs, those that were martyrs from choice? Calvinists. What was John Careless, who was burnt to death three hundred years ago? You have read of it, perhaps some of you. Gloriously he speaks of this very doctrine, "Careless," he says, "is my name, and careless I am about what they do with my body; electing grace will take hold of my soul. My standing is secure, my standing is firm; the victory is won, and I am saved, and it matters but little to me what they do with my body, while I know that my name is written in heaven, and I shall spend a happy eternity in giving thanks unto him who has from the beginning chosen me to salvation." Amen, and amen.