

The PRESBYTERIAN Journal

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S.S. LESSON AND YOUTH PROGRAM FOR NOVEMBER 13

God's Electing Purpose

It seems plain, then, that God chooses on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will harden in their sin. Of course, I can almost hear your retort: "If this is so, and God's Will is irresistible, why does God blame men for what they do?" But the question really is this: "Who are you, a man, to make any such reply to God?" When a craftsman makes anything he doesn't expect it to turn around and say, "Why did you make me like this?" The potter, for instance, is always assumed to have complete control over the clay, making with one part of the lump a lovely vase, and with another a pipe for sewage. Can we not assume that God has the same control over human clay? May it not be that God, though He must sooner or later expose His wrath against sin and show His controlling Hand, has yet most patiently endured the presence in His world of things that cry out to be destroyed? Can we not see, in this, His purpose in demonstrating the boundless resources of His glory upon those whom He considers fit to receive His mercy, and whom He long ago planned to raise to glorious life? And by these chosen people I mean you and me, whom He has called out from both Jews and Gentiles.

Romans 9:18-24

Translated by J. B. Phillips

LETTERS TO YOUNG CHURCHES

(See Editorial, "Election," p. 10)

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ACROSS the EDITOR'S DESK

This issue of the *Journal* is almost altogether given over to suggestive approaches to the vital doctrine of Election. The last time we did this was with the March 2 issue. This time we are following through with the letter "U" in **TULIP** as we continue the theme of "Basic Doctrines of the Reformed Faith."

One order for "Protestant Distinctives" came in an envelope wrinkled and smelling strongly of gasoline. The address was blurred and almost illegible. The Post Office had stamped the envelope, "Damaged In Airplane Accident." The postmark read, "Boston, Mass., Oct. 4."

The Internal Revenue Service has sternly warned churches and religious agencies not to use any of their parishioner's contributions for political purposes or to influence political campaigns, or they will endanger their tax-exempt status. Ordinarily, of course, religious agencies (including religious papers) speak out on almost every subject affecting American life, without being noticed. But this is apparently different. Hence the threat.

In a lighter vein, from Des Plaines, Ill., comes word that the observance of "Cemetery Sunday" is being urged by certain cemetery interests. The organization involved is circulating a model sermon and a bulletin insert called "Death is a Beginning." The idea, no doubt, is to stimulate interest in cemeteries.

Two more awards of a beautiful King James Bible are announced for the perfect recitation of the Shorter Catechism. In Traveler's Rest, S. C., (Rev. Charles H. Brown, pastor), Miss Nancy Libby. And in Mt. Mourne, N. C., Miss Stella E. Sparrow, age 75. Younger people, take note!

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The Pilgrimage of a Soul

Prof. JOHN MURRAY

No doubt many readers have had some trouble with the doctrine of election. Perhaps you have endured the sorest travail of soul in connection with it. Perhaps when you were aroused to some intelligent interest in this matter, there was one doctrine you found in Scripture that appeared to present an insuperable enigma, indeed an insuperable barrier to saving hope. Oh, you have said, if only I could tear out of the Bible that horrible doctrine of election, together with its companion doctrine of reprobation!

Foreordination! That is what cuts athwart the path of my hope. For it cuts away every inducement to any effort on my part. If I am elected, you say, I shall be saved in any case. If I am not elected, I am foredoomed to perdition, whatever I may try to do in the matter.

I have no way of knowing in what class I am. And so bewildering perplexity, if not despair, was the result.

But some evangelist came along and appeared to be the ambassador of peace to you in this slough of despond. He told you that God did not in the exercise of His sovereign good pleasure from all eternity elect some to salvation and foreordain others to death. No, not at all. Truly, he said, election is in the Bible, but you have misunderstood it.

The election you find in the Bible is just the election of those who believe. God foresaw from eternity who would believe in Christ and who would not. And so He elected those whom He foresaw would believe and, of course, did not elect those whom He foresaw would reject. There is no such thing, said he, as unconditional election. After all, it is entirely left to you whether you will accept or reject the Gospel.

A wave of new hope invaded your soul. You began to take courage.

God has left me, you said, with my responsibility. The exercise of that responsibility is my part, it is my contribution. If I do my part, God will do His. God gives to all men a chance of salvation, and it is simply up to me to take advantage of that chance. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation."

It must not be said that the breeze of hope that crossed the brow of your despondent soul had no justification at all. There was some truth in this experience of yours. But it was truth distorted by the most dangerous error. And God was merciful to your soul. He did not allow that momentary peace to continue. The breeze of refreshment passed and the fever of despondency again settled upon your soul.

For you began to read your Bible and you read in Ephesians 1:4-6, "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, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved."

You read this, you read through the chapter, you read the second chapter too, and you read other portions of Scripture to the same effect. You said to yourself, This sounds very like the doctrine I was taught in the Shorter Catechism, "God having, out of His mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer" (Q.20).

So again you found yourself in the grip of the old enigma, and you could not accept the solution of your good-intentioned evangelist. It did not accord with your understanding of the

truth of Scripture. God was merciful to your soul. He had led you to put truth above even the relief you so much sought and needed.

But another evangelist came along. He appeared severe, even harsh. He preached total depravity. He preached unconditional election. His emphasis upon the absolute sovereignty of God was irresistible. He appeared to have little sympathy with the deep wound that was cutting into the vitals of your spirit. He drove the sword even deeper. But his message rang true to Scripture. It bore the hall-mark of truth. It commended itself to your conscience in the sight of God. It met with profound response in your soul.

The same evangelist, however, preached the Gospel of sovereign grace, of full and free salvation. The overtures of the Gospel, he said, were given in the full, free and unfettered call of the Gospel to sinners. He set forth Christ in all the glory of His Person and in all the perfection of His finished work. In Christ's name he invited you to Christ. He said that this free offer of salvation to you as a sinner dead in trespasses and sins came to you upon the very crest of the wave of the divine sovereignty, that it was the waves of the divine sovereignty that brought these sweet overtures of grace and love and caused them to break upon the very threshold of your need and responsibility.

He told you that it was not as one informed or convinced of your election by God that you were invited, exhorted, commanded and called to put your trust in Jesus' name, but as a sinner lost and condemned. He told you that your election was not the warrant which you were to believe in Jesus, but rather that the warrant upon which you were to trust in Him was His all-sufficiency, all-suitability and perfection as Saviour, together with the invitations, demands and

promises of the Gospel. He quoted, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." "The spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Your heart was drawn. The glory and love of Christ captivated your heart. The simplicity and beauty of the Gospel placed an irresistible mysterious constraint upon your spirit. It was all so simple, it was all so harmonious. You entrusted yourself to the Saviour of sinners. You had peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The peace of God that passeth all understanding possessed your heart and mind. "Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, con-

vincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel" (Shorter Catechism Q. 31). God was merciful to your soul.

Now you have no dispute with sovereign and unconditional election. You see clearly that, if it were not for the sovereign electing grace of God, there would be salvation for none. You now rejoice with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory in the electing love of God the Father, the redeeming love of God the Son and the regenerating love of God the Holy Ghost.

Thanksgiving and rejoicing break into adoration and you say in the words

of an ancient liturgy, "One is holy, the Father; one is holy, the Son; one is holy, the Holy Ghost." You yield the total assent and consent of your spirit to the sovereignty expressed in the words of our Lord, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matt. 11:25, 26).

* * * *

The above is an adaptation of portions of a tract, "Arminianism in the Pilgrimage of a Soul," reprinted in *ETERNAL TRUTH*, Edinburgh. Prof. Murray, its author, occupies the Chair of Systematic Theology in Westminster Seminary.

John Knox on Predestination

But alas! To such blasphemy the devil never did draw mankind as now of late days, in which no small number are become so bold, so impudent and so irreverent that they fear not openly to affirm God to be unjust, if He in His eternal counsel has elected more of one sort of men than another, to life everlasting in Christ Jesus our Lord. . . . The doctrine of God's eternal predestination is so necessary to the Church of God, that without the same, faith can neither be truly taught, nor surely established; man can never be brought to true humility and knowledge of himself, neither yet can he be ravished in admiration of God's eternal goodness, and so moved to praise Him aright. . . .

There is no way more proper to build and establish faith, than when we hear and undoubtedly do believe that our election, which the Spirit of God doth seal in our hearts, consists not in ourselves, but in the eternal and immutable good pleasure of God. And that in such firmness that it cannot be overthrown, neither by the raging storms of the world, nor by the assaults of Satan, neither yet by the wavering and weakness of our own flesh. Then only is our salvation in assurance, when we find the cause of the same in the bosom and counsel of God. . . .

Such as cannot abide the mention of God's eternal election, can never be rightly humbled nor thankful, for they cannot acknowledge that God according to the good pleasure of His eternal counsel, has made separation betwixt those who fell into equal perdition, as touching the offence and sin committed. Such as desire this article to be buried in silence, and would that men should teach and believe that the grace of God's election is common unto all — but that one re-

ceives it and another receives it not, proceeding either from the obedience or disobedience of man — such deceive themselves and are unthankful and injurious unto God. For as long as they see not that true faith and salvation spring from election, and are the gift of God, and are not of ourselves — so long are they deceived and remain in error (Eph. 2:8). And what can be more injurious unto God's free grace than to affirm that He gives no more to one than to another; seeing that the whole Scriptures do plainly teach that we have nothing which we have not received of free grace and mercy, and not of our works, nor of anything in us, lest any man should boast.

And therefore let wicked men rage as they list, we will not be ashamed to confess always, that grace only makes difference betwixt us and the rest of the world. And further, we fear not to affirm, that such as feel not that comfort inwardly in their conscience, can never be thankful to God, neither yet willing to be subject to His eternal counsel; which is the only cause that these wicked men most irreverently do storm and rage against that doctrine which they do not understand. Let us, dear brethren, be assured, that none other doctrine doth establish or make men humble and thankful unto God. And, finally, that none other doctrine makes man careful to obey God according to His commandment, but that doctrine only which so spoils man of all power and virtue, that no portion of his salvation consists within himself; to the end that the whole praise of our redemption may be referred to Christ Jesus alone.

—From the preface to the treatise of Knox on Predestination, 1560.