

INTRODUCTION.

ON several accounts I am particularly gratified in being permitted to introduce this little volume. As it respects its author, it may be regarded as a kind of first-fruits of that diligence to approve himself a faithful steward, rightly dividing to every man a portion in due season; which, as it has already secured for him the confidence and regard of a large and growing congregation, cannot fail to bring forth still more abundantly to the glory of God, to the edification of his people, and to his own recompense and great reward.

This volume is not less gratifying, as a manifest proof of the prosperity of the congregation for whose benefit it is printed, and in whose welfare I have ever taken a deep and sincere interest. I rejoice with them in the present happy relations in which they stand to each other, and to a pastor in whom they can so cordially unite; and my earnest prayer is, that they may long continue to grow up together into a holy temple in the Lord.

The doctrine unfolded and treated of in this book, is truly one of those "hard sayings"—those "Scriptures which men wrest to their own destruction"—or at least to the injury of that peace and joy in believing, which would impart the assurance of faith to their own hearts, and of that love and charity which would fill them with brotherly kindness towards all who call upon the Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours.

It might quiet the resentment with which this doctrine is repelled by its opponents, were they to consider that fundamen-

tal as we regard it to be to THE SYSTEM of the gospel, and as an answer to the inquiry how that system was devised and perfected, that nevertheless there is a broad platform of common Christianity upon which we can meet, where we can walk arm in arm, and where we can labor hand to hand with Christians of every evangelical denomination.

We must carefully distinguish between the relation of fundamental doctrines, *first*, to the system of revealed truth; *secondly*, to the church; and *thirdly*, to individual salvation; since a truth may be essential in any one of these cases and not in the others. In other words, what is essential to the scheme of salvation and to a full confession of what this scheme is, in its nature, origin, and plan, is very different from what is essential to the being of a church, and to the enjoyment of the benefits of salvation by individual inquirers.

Many things are essential to the conception, design and completion of the *scheme* of salvation, and consequently to that *system* of truth which imbodyes the origination as well as the actual nature and way of salvation,—which are not essential to a participation of all the benefits of that salvation as a scheme already finished and complete, and offered to our acceptance. It is one thing to ask, “How was this glorious scheme devised and perfected, and what is its comprehensive plan?” and another to ask, “What must I do to be saved?” The answer to these two questions must be altogether as different as would be the answers to the question, “How came I to exist, and how am I constituted?” and to the question, “How am I to act so as to enjoy and to perpetuate this life?” The one refers to the nature of things, and is purely abstract. The other refers to duty, and is as purely practical. The one relates to the *science*, and the other to the *way* of salvation. The one describes the origin and the method of salvation, the other tells me how this salvation may be secured *by me*. The one unfolds the divine philosophy of salvation, and leads us back to its origin in

the counsels of eternity and the covenant of grace, while the other puts us in the way and leads us forward to the full and everlasting enjoyment of it in a blessed immortality. To the former, and not to the latter, belong all those "doctrines of high mystery" which are to be "handled with special prudence and care," and about which there ever have been such diversities of opinion among those who must on all hands be acknowledged as humble, honest, and sincere inquirers after the true knowledge of God's word and will.

To the *scheme* of salvation, and a complete *system of divine truth*, these doctrines, that is, whatever is plainly revealed or can be properly inferred from the words of inspiration, however high and mysterious, must be considered as essential. Here, however, there is room given for those diversities of opinion to which, in our present state, the nature, capacity, and degree of cultivation of the human mind will inevitably lead, even when directed to the study of the Scriptures with prayerful examination and habitual docility. About these truths, therefore, there may be an honest, humble, and reverent difference of opinion. These are among the things about which even those who are "perfect" may be "otherwise minded," without bringing into question their *Christian* character, or interfering with their Christian union and co-operation in *those* things "in which they ARE agreed."*

Another reason which may moderate the resentment cherished towards this doctrine is that it is not made by the Presbyterian church a test of piety, and therefore not a pre-requisite to *Christian* communion and membership. As a truth fundamental to the system of revealed truth and the divine philosophy of the plan of salvation, the doctrine of Election is held forth in the standards of the church, taught in her pulpits, her works and her catechisms, and made necessary to be both

* See discourse by the author on the fundamental doctrines of Christianity and Phil., A. S. S. U.

received and believed by those who assume the office of bishops or elders. But while the effectual call, the saving faith, and the godly sorrow of every true penitent who seeks admission to her membership, are believed to be the fruits of this heavenly tree and the streams from this divine fountain, yet it is not believed that a perfect knowledge and understanding of this high mystery, is essential to the experience of "the power of God unto salvation."

Another observation which may lead to a less prejudiced examination of this doctrine of Election is, that it is not a doctrine peculiar to revelation, but one which is found imbodyed in the whole system of divine government. The objections, therefore, and the prejudice against this doctrine, apply equally to every department of the divine workmanship and providence.

A belief in this doctrine is founded in that constitutional principle of our nature, by which we are led intuitively and necessarily to believe that every effect must have a cause fully adequate to its production. For when we consider this whole universe as ONE system, governed by ONE mind, regulated by His will, and conspiring to the promotion of His glory, we are irresistibly led to believe that every thing was constituted according to a divine plan, is carried on by divinely appointed laws, and is made to work together for the accomplishment of His purposes.

The very conception of God as omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and equally existing in the past, present and future eternity, implies in it all that is involved in the doctrine of Election, as it regards every part of His wide dominion, and teaches us that every thing which takes place in nature, providence and grace, comes to pass in accordance with the fixed purpose and will of God, which must be eternal. Sovereignty, foreknowledge, predestination, predetermination, and efficient direction and control are necessary parts of God's universal providence over all His works, and over all His intelligent creatures. The further science advances, the clearer is the proof

that this knowledge and this providence are essential to the very nature of God; whether therefore, we look to the heavens or the earth, to the elements, the seasons, the productions of our globe, its minerals, its plants, or its animals, we find the same fixed and invariable laws, by which all are governed and directed. We are therefore told that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without our heavenly Father's knowledge, and that the hairs of our head, as well as our days, are all numbered. The same thing is true in the moral government of God, the only difference being this, that in this kingdom, free, moral and accountable beings are the subjects of God's dominion. His government is adapted to their nature, and works in them to will and to do of His good pleasure. All objections, therefore, to the doctrine of predestination as it regards the kingdom of grace, are overruled and set aside by the existence of the same principles of divine procedure, throughout God's wide and universal dominion, and the only question left for reason and inquiry is, "Is this doctrine taught in the word of God?" If it is, then any objections against it are inapplicable, since they apply as much to God's nature and providence, as these are manifested in every other department of His works.

One other remark which I would make is, that reprobation is not included in the doctrine of Election. Reprobation is not a counterpart of Election. Election or choice implies it is true that some are not chosen, who are called in Scripture, "*the rest.*" But it is not less true that reprobation in Scripture is never opposed to Election or used in connection with it.

A person in Scripture language may be *reprobate* and yet elected. "Know ye not," says the apostle, "that Jesus Christ *is* in you, except ye be reprobates?" 2 Cor. 15:15. There was a time when Christ was not in Paul, and when Paul was mad against Christ. "But," says he, "it pleased God to reveal His son in me." Until then Paul was *reprobate*, but he never was *non-elect*, but was on the contrary chosen or elect in

Christ before the world was. And so has every child of God been found naturally, and has remained *reprobate*, "without Christ in the world," until called by His grace, and enabled to make their calling and Election sure.

Again, reprobation in Scripture is always distinguished from Election, by having direct respect to the character and condition of the party so described; whereas, Election is an act of God's sovereignty arising merely from the will of God, without any fitness or merit in the individuals elected. Sin and unbelief are the characteristics of the reprobate; and continued impenitence, unbelief and sin constitute the only reason why God will punish those who die reprobates. The end of God's decree in this case, is not the condemnation of the creature, but the manifestation of His own glorious justice. And as sin is the effect of man's free will, and condemnation is the effect of justice, so the decree of God is the cause of neither.

Reprobation in Scripture stands opposed, therefore, not to *election* but to *approbation*. Hence vile professors are compared to the alloy or dross, frequently mixed with metal, which on trial is found base or deficient in quality. "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because God has rejected them." Jer. 6:30. Thus also the apostle means to say that the mere profession of any man in whom Christ is not, is of no value. It will at last be found mere refuse. All such "are nothing and less than nothing." 2 Cor. 13:5, 6. Thus also men of corrupt minds are called "reprobates concerning the faith;" that is, persons destitute of a true understanding of the truth. 2 Tim. 3:8. See also Tit. 1:16 and Rom. 1:26—29.

It is therefore manifest that reprobation in Scripture does not mean that a person is not elected to salvation, and much less that he is absolutely appointed to eternal misery, but that in his present character, principles or conduct, he is regarded with disapprobation by God.

Election therefore, let it be remembered, is neither the *cause*

nor the *occasion* of damnation. Election arises out of God's sovereign will, and has exclusive reference to the salvation of a sinner who deserves damnation, and can therefore in no way be predicated upon that sinner's claims to mercy. Damnation on the contrary, arises from the holiness of God's nature, and the equity of His government, and has reference to the guilt of the individual damned. If then it be right in God to punish sin, He must resolve and determine to do so. This however is not Election, nor in any way consequent upon it.

But I must conclude, and would therefore express the hope, that this volume will be examined with that candor and prayerful consideration, which the importance of the subject demands.

THOMAS SMYTH.

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