

ELECTION—ITS DEFENSES AND EVIDENCES

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*“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.
 For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost,
 and in much assurance. And ye became followers of us,
 and of the Lord having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.”
 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6*

AT the very announcement of the text, some will be ready to say, “Why preach upon so profound a doctrine as election?” I answer, because it is in God’s Word, and whatever is in the Word of God is to be preached. “But some truths ought to be kept back from the people,” you will say, “lest they should make an ill use of them.” That is Popish doctrine. It was upon that very theory that the priests kept back the Bible from the people—they did not give it to them lest they should misuse it.

“But are not some doctrines dangerous?” Not if they are true and rightly handled. Truth is never dangerous—it is error and reticence that are fraught with peril. “But do not men abuse the doctrines of grace?” I grant you that they do, but if we destroyed everything that men misuse, we would have nothing left. Are there to be no ropes because some fools will hang themselves? And must cutlery be discarded and denounced because there are some who will use dangerous weapons for the destruction of their adversaries? Decidedly not.

Besides all this, remember that men read the Scriptures, and think about these doctrines, and therefore often make mistakes about them. Who, then, shall set them right if we, who preach the Word, hold our tongues about the matter?

I know that some men who have embraced the doctrine of election have become Antinomians. Such men would probably have found other excuses for their misdeeds if they had not sheltered themselves under the shadow of this doctrine. The sun will ripen the noxious weed as well as the fruitful plant, but that is not the fault of the sun, but of the nature of the weed itself. We believe, however, that more persons are made Antinomians through those who deny the doctrine than through those who preach it.

One evidence of this is that in Scotland you will scarcely find a congregation of Hyper-Calvinists—the simple reason being that the church in Scotland holds entire the whole doctrine upon this matter, and her ministers, as a rule, are not ashamed to preach it fearlessly and boldly, and in connection with the rest of the faith.

Take any doctrine and preach upon it exclusively, and you distort it. The fairest face in the world, with the most comely features, would soon become unseemly if one feature were permitted to expand while the rest were kept in their usual form. Proportion, I take it, is beauty, and to preach every truth in its fair proportion, neither keeping back any nor giving undue prominence to any, is to preach the whole truth as Christ would have it preached. On a Gospel thus entire and harmonious, we may expect to have the blessing of the Most High.

So much by way of preface, not by way of apology. It is not my custom to offer any apology for speaking the truth.

I. WHAT IS THIS DOCTRINE OF ELECTION? Let us try to understand it as spoken of in the text—“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.”

There is such a thing as election. Any man who should deny that man is a free agent might well be thought unreasonable, but free will is a different thing from free agency. Luther denounced free will when he said that “free will is the name for nothing.” And President Jonathan Edwards demolished the idea in his masterly treatise.

God is the universal agent and does as He wills—and His will is supremely good. He is the superlative agent, and man, acting according to the devices of his own heart, is nevertheless overruled by that sovereign and wise legislation which causes the wrath of man (that agency in which the creature cannot govern himself) to praise Him and the remainder thereof He restrains.

How these two things are true I cannot tell. It is not necessary for our good, either in this life or the next, that we should have the skill to solve such problems. I am not sure that in heaven we shall be able to know where the free agency of man and the sovereignty of God meet, but both are great truths.

God has predestinated everything, yet man is responsible, for he acts freely, and no constraint is put upon him even when he sins and disobeys wantonly and wickedly the will of God. But so many as are saved, you will say, are saved because they believe. Certainly it is so. It is most true—God forbid I should deny it—but wherefore do they believe? They believe as the result of the working of the grace of God in their hearts.

Since every man who is saved confesses this, since every true believer in the world acknowledges that something special has been done for him more than for the impenitent, the fact is established that God does make a difference. No one ever heard it laid as an impeachment against the Lord that He has made such a difference, so I cannot see why He should be impeached for intending to make that difference—which is the doctrine of election.

I am saved, but I know it is not because of any goodness in me, and if you are saved, you will freely confess that it is the distinguishing love of God that has made you to differ. The doctrine of election is simply God’s intention to make the difference between people which you know exists. While He gives mercy to all, He gives more mercy to some so that the mercy already received shall be made effectual to their eternal salvation.

This election of God is sovereign. He chooses as He will. Who shall call Him to account? “Can I not do as I will with my own?” is His answer to every caviler. “Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” is the solemn utterance that silences every one who would impugn the justice of the Most High. He has a right, seeing we are all criminals, to punish whom He will. As King of the universe, He doubtless acts with discretion, but still according to His sovereignty. Wisely, not wantonly, He rules, but ever according to the counsel of His own will. Election, then, is sovereign.

Again, *election is free.* Whatever may be God’s reason for choosing a man, certainly it is not because of any good thing in that man. He is chosen because God will do so. We can get no further. We get as far as those words of Christ, “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight,” and there we stop—for beyond that no philosophy and no Scripture can take us.

As it is sovereign and free, so *election is irreversible.* Having chosen His people, He does not cast them away nor call back the word that is gone from His lips, for it is written, “He hateth putting away.” He is of one mind and who can turn Him?

Once more, *election is effectual.* For “whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

And this *election is personal,* for He calls out His children one by one by their names. He calls them even as He leads out the stars and so He brings them every one to the Father’s house above.

We have thus given a statement as to what this doctrine is. There we will leave it. Our present object is not so much to expound the doctrine as to strike a blow or two at certain errors which are very common and which spring out of it. I know, dear friends, there are some who are so afraid of this doctrine that the mention of it produces alarm. If they were to meet a lion in their way, they would not be more terrified than they are when they see this doctrine in Scripture or hear it from the pulpit.

II. Therefore, secondly, we will NOTICE WHAT ARE THE DEFENSES OF THIS DOCTRINE and try, if we can, should you be laboring under any distress of mind about it, to remove your difficulties.

Will you please remember, then, that *this is not a point which you can understand at the commencement of spiritual and religious life?* You would not teach your children, I suppose, to say their prayers backwards and begin at, “Amen.” And you are beginning at the wrong end when you want first of all to know your election instead of commencing with repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Election is a lesson for the more advanced students. Faith and hope must be learned, first of all, in the infant class, to which we all must go if we would be wise unto salvation.

Now, if a child should have a book of algebra put into his hand and should puzzle himself and say, “I shall never get an education, for I cannot understand this,” and then take down some ancient classic and say, “I cannot comprehend this,” you would say, “Dear child, you have nothing to do with these yet. Here is a sampler book for you—a primer. Here you have A, B, C—learn this first, and then, step by step, you shall attain to the rest.”

Even so it is with us. Simple trust in Christ is the first thing you have to understand, after that you shall know the high, the sublime, and the glorious doctrine of God’s decrees, but do not begin with these. You will mystify and ruin yourself—you will lose your way in a fog and get no good thereby.

Again, it is very certain that whatever this doctrine may be—and we will have no dispute about it just now—*this doctrine cannot possibly be inconsistent with certain plain promises in God’s Word.* Such promises as these—“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” “He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.”

Why, I might quote by the hour together some of these promises which are as wide as the poles—invitations that must not be narrowed, exhortations which are addressed to every man and woman under heaven—in which every one of them is bidden to hear and live. “Ho! Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.” You know the class of promises to which I allude.

Now, these are the words of God which are for you—get hold of them—come to Jesus Christ with them in your hand, and rest assured the doctrine of election, instead of pushing you back, shall stand like the servants about your father’s table to make music, while your whole being shall dance to the glorious tune. It shall be like a dish upon the table at the feast of the returning prodigal, of which you shall eat to the very full. It shall by no means repulse you or show anything to you which may keep you from hoping in Christ.

Once more, it is quite certain that whatever it may be, *this doctrine of election does not deliver you from your duty.* Now what is your duty? “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” So much is this your absolute duty that, “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed.”

This more than anything else is the reason of men’s condemnation. The Scripture says this is the one great sin. Of the Spirit of truth we read that “when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin—of sin because they believe not on me.” Very well, then—in as much as God has so put it, that He commands you this day to trust Christ and to believe on Him—that is what you have to see to—and you may rest perfectly sure that falling back on the doctrine of election in order to exonerate you from what God commands you to perform is but a pitiful pretense.

You are commanded to believe, and what God commands no doctrine may teach that it is unfit for you to do. May God help you to believe, for this doctrine comes not to excuse you. The Gospel commands you and election through the Holy Ghost enables you. It is your duty to believe, but no man ever was saved as a matter of duty, for that which saves is the gift of God.

But your business now is with Christ only, and not with the decrees of the Father, which are all in the keeping of Christ and shall presently be revealed to you. You have to go to Christ first, and to His

Father afterwards, for says He, “No man comes unto the Father but by me.” You must go round the cross to get to the decree—you must go round by redemption to get to election—there is no other way.

III. In the third place let us see WHAT ARE THE EVIDENCES OF ELECTION. Our text says, very plainly too, that the apostle knew the election of the Thessalonians. How did he know it? The way by which the apostle knew it must be the method by which you and I are to know our election of God too.

We have known more than once in our day of some men who pretended to know their election by their impudence. They had got into their head the presumption that they were elected and though they lived on in sin and still did as they liked, they imagined they were God’s chosen. This is what I call presuming upon election by sheer impudence.

We know of others, alas! who have imagined themselves to be elect, because of the visions that they have seen when they have been asleep or when they have been awake—for men have waking dreams—and they have brought these as evidences of their election. These are of as much value as cobwebs would be for a garment. They will be of as much service to you at the day of judgment as a thief’s convictions would be to him if he were in need of a character to commend him to mercy.

You may dream long enough before you dream yourself into heaven—and you may have as many stupid notions in your head, as there are romances in your circulating libraries, but because they are in your head they are not therefore in God’s Book. We need a more sure word of testimony than this, and if we have it not, God forbid that we should indulge our vain heart with the dainty thought that we are chosen of God.

I have heard of one who said in an alehouse that he could say more than any of the rest, that he was one of God’s children. Meanwhile he drank deeper into intoxication than the rest. Surely he might have said, with an emphasis, that he was one of the devil’s children. He would have been correct. When immoral men, and men who live constantly in sin, prate about being God’s children, we discern them at once. Just as we know a crab tree when we see the fruit hanging upon it, we understand what spirit these people are of when we see their walk and conversation.

Oh, it is detestable, loathsome above all loathsomeness, to hear men whose characters in secret are infamous, and whose lives are destitute of every Christian virtue, boasting as though they had the keys of heaven and could set up whomsoever they would, and pull down whomsoever they might please.

Blessed be God, we are not under their domination, for a more terrific set of tyrants than they are the world has never known, and a more frightful reign of vice than they would inaugurate, if they had their way, I am sure villainy itself cannot conceive. “Be not deceived, God is not mocked.” “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” If grace does not make us holy, teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, it is not worth the having. Brethren, if we are God’s elect we must have some substantial evidence to attest it.

According to our text, what are these evidences? They seem to be four. *The first evidence appears to be the Word of God coming home with power.* If you will turn to the verse, you will soon see how the apostle says, “Our gospel came not unto you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Ghost.” The Gospel is preached in the ears of all—it only comes with power to some. The power that is in the Gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, otherwise men would be the converters of souls. Nor does it lie in the preacher’s learning, otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of man.

The power which converts souls does not even lie in the preacher’s simplicity or adaptation to his work—that is a secondary agency, but not the cause. Again, the power which converts souls does not even lie in the pathos which the speaker may employ. Men may weep to the tragic muse in a theater as well as to prophetic strains in a chapel. Their creature passions may be impressed through the acting on the stage as well as by the utterance of God’s own servants.

No, there is something more than this needed and where it is absent, all preaching is a nullity. We might preach till our tongues rotted, till we should exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be

converted unless there were the mysterious power of the Holy Ghost going with it, changing the will of man.

O sirs! We might as well preach to stone walls as preach to humanity unless the Holy Ghost be with the Word to give it power to convert the soul. We are reminded of Mr. Rowland Hill, who once met a man in the street at night, not quite drunk, but almost so. The man said, “Mr. Hill, I am one of your converts.” “Yes,” he said, “I dare say you are one of *mine*—but if you were one of *God’s*, you would not be in the state in which you now are.” Our converts are worth nothing. If they are converted by man, they can be unconverted by man. If some charm or power of one preacher can bring them to Christ, some charm or power of another preacher can take them from Christ. True conversion is the work of the Holy Ghost and of the Holy Ghost alone.

Well, then, my hearers, did you ever, when listening to the Word, feel a divine power coming with it? Never mind where you were, whether in Westminster Abbey, St. Paul’s Cathedral, in this Tabernacle, or at some special service at one of the theaters—the place matters nothing. “Well,” perhaps you will say, “I have felt some impression.” Ah, but that may be wiped away. Have you ever felt something coming with the Word which you could not understand. Which, while it wooed you and won your heart, smote you as though a sword had gone through you, and that not with a flesh wound, but with a wound that divides between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow, as if the truth were, as indeed it is, a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the hearts?

Those who are really God’s elect can tell a tale something like this. “There was a time when the Word was to me like a great ten thonged-whip—my shoulders were stripped bare, and every time the Word was preached, it seemed to make a gash within my soul. I trembled. I saw God in arms against me. I understood that I was in debt to justice and could not pay—that I was involved in a controversy against my Maker and could not conquer. I saw myself stripped naked to my shame, leprous from head to foot, a bankrupt and a felon ready to be given over to a traitor’s doom.” Truly the Word came with power to your soul.

“And” you continue, “I remember too when the truth came home to my heart, and made me leap for very joy, for it took all my load away—it showed me Christ’s power to save. I had known the truth before, but now I felt it. I had understood that Christ could save, but now that fact came home to me. I went to Jesus just as I was—I touched the hem of His garment, I was made whole. I found now that the Word was not a fiction—that it was the one reality. I had listened scores of times and he that spoke was as one that played a tune upon an instrument—but now he seemed to be dealing with me, putting His hand right into my heart and getting hold of me. He brought me first to God’s judgment seat, and there I stood and heard the thunders roll. Then he brought me to the mercy seat and I saw the blood sprinkled on it, and I went home triumphing because my sin was washed away.” Oh, again I ask you, did the Word ever come home with this power to your souls?

Since the day of your conversion has the Word ever rebuked you? Has it sometimes cut down your hopes? Do you sometimes, after hearing a sermon, feel as if it had been like a great hurricane tearing right through the forest of your thoughts, cleaving its own course, and leaving many a dead thing that you thought alive swept down to the ground?

Do you feel, too, when you go home from the sanctuary, as if God Himself had been there, you did not know what else it could be. It could not have been the speaker nor the words he uttered, but the very God did come and look into your eyes, and searched the thoughts of your mind, and turned your heart upside down, and then filled it full again with His love and with His light, with His truth and with His joy, with His peace and with His desire after holiness? Is it so with you? Where the Word is not with power to your souls, you lack the proof of election.

Remember, I do not say that it will be so always. You must not expect every time that God will speak with you—in fact, the preacher himself fails often, and is painfully conscious of it. How shall one man always speak without sometimes feeling that he himself is not in a fit frame to be God’s mouthpiece? But though it be a clown from the country, if he preaches God’s Word, the Spirit will go

with it. It is not the clown, nor yet the archbishop that does the work—it is the Word that is quick and powerful.

Your evidence of election is blotted and blurred unless the Word has come to you with demonstration of the Spirit and with power. People come and hear sermons in this place and then they go out and say, “How did you like it”—as if that meant anything to anybody—“How did you like it?” And one says, “Oh, very well.” And another says, “Oh, not at all.” Do you think we live on the breath of your nostrils? Do you believe that God’s servants, if they are really His, care for what you think of them?

Nay, verily, but if you should reply, “I enjoyed the sermon,” they are inclined to say, “Then we must have been unfaithful or else you would have been angry—we must surely have slurred over something or else the Word would have cut your conscience as with the jagged edges of a knife. You would have said, ‘I did not think how I liked it—I was thinking how I liked myself and about my own state before God. That was the matter that exercised me, not whether he preached well, but whether I stood accepted in Christ, or whether I was a castaway.’”

My dear hearers, are you learning to hear like that? If you are not, if going to church and to chapel be to you like going to an oratorio, or like listening to some orator who speaks upon temporal matters, then you lack the evidence of election—the Word has not come to your souls with power.

But there is yet a second evidence of election. *Those whom God has chosen receive the Word “in much assurance.”* They do not all receive it with full assurance—that is a grace they get afterwards—but they receive it with much assurance. There are some professors who go upon very strange principles. It is indeed somewhat difficult to know what principles are enforced and acknowledged in this age, for there are persons whose principles allow them to say black and white at the same time, and there are certain persons whose religious principles are not much unlike this.

They put a hymn book in their pockets when they are going to a meeting. They put a comic song book in their pockets when they are going somewhere else. They can hold with the hare and run with the hounds. Such people as these never have any very great confidence in their religion—and it is very proper that they should not—for their religion is not worth the time they spend in making a profession of it.

But the true Christian, when he gets hold of principles, keeps them, and there is no mistake about the grip with which he maintains his hold of them. “Ah!” says he, “that Word which I have heard with my ears is the very truth of God, and it is true to me, real and substantial to me, and here I clasp it with both hands—with a clasp that neither time, nor tribulation, nor death shall ever cause me to let go.”

To a Christian man his religion is a part of himself—he believes the truth, not because he has been told it or taught it by mother or friend, but because it is true to him in his inmost soul. He is like the servant girl who, when she could not answer her infidel master, said, “Sir, I cannot answer you, but I have a something in here that would if it could speak.” There is “much assurance.”

Sinners who have once felt their need of a Savior feel very much assurance about His preciousness, and saints that have once found Him precious have very much assurance about His divinity, about His atonement, about His everlasting love, about His immortal dignity as a Prophet, a Priest and a King. They are sure of it.

I know some persons who say if a man speaks positively, he is dogmatical. Glorious old dogmatism, when will you come back to earth? It is these “ifs,” and “buts,” and qualifications—these, “perhapses,” and “maybe so’s” that have ruined our pulpits. Look at Luther when he stood up for the glory of his God—was there ever such a dogmatist? “I believe it,” he said, “and therefore I speak it.” From that day, when on Pilate’s staircase, he was trying to creep up and down the stairs to win heaven, when the sentence out of the musty folio came before him, “Justified by faith we have peace with God,” that man was as sure that works could not save him as he was of his own existence.

Now, if he had come out and said, “Gentlemen, I have a theory to propound that may be correct. Excuse my doing so,” and so on, the Papacy would have been dominant to this day. But he knew God

had said it and he felt that that was God's own way to his own soul—and he could not help dogmatizing with that glorious force of secession which soon laid his foes prostrate at his feet.

Now have *you* received the Gospel “with much assurance”? If you have and you can say, “Christ is mine. I trust in Him, and though I may have sometimes doubts about my own interest in Him, yet I do know by experience in my soul that He is a precious Christ—I know not by ‘*Paley’s Evidences*’ nor by ‘*Butler’s Analogy*,’ but I know by my heart’s inward evidence. I know by the analogy of my own soul’s experience that the truth which I have received is no cunningly devised fable, but something that came from God to draw my soul up to God”—that is another evidence of election.

If you have that, never mind the rest. I hardly care whether you believe the doctrine of election or not—you are elect. As I have sometimes told a brother who has denied the doctrine of final perseverance, when I have seen his holy life, “Never mind, my brother, you will persevere to the end, and you will prove the doctrine that you do not believe. You may not be able to receive the doctrine I now preach, but if such has been your experience, when you get to heaven you will wake up and say, ‘Well, I am one of the elect. I made a deal of fuss about it while on the earth, but I will make a deal of music about it now that I have got to heaven, and I will sing more sweetly and loudly than all the rest, “Unto him that hath loved me and washed me from my sins in his blood, unto him be glory for ever and ever.”’”

But there is a third evidence. *Those who are chosen of the Lord desire to be like Him.* “You became followers of us and of the Lord,” the apostle says in the text—by which he does not mean that they said, “I am of Paul, I am of Silas, I am of Timothy”—but that they imitated Paul so far as he imitated Christ.

Thomas a Kempis wrote a book about the imitation of Christ and a blessed book in some respects it is. But I would like the Holy Spirit to write in your hearts *the* imitation of Christ. It shall be to you a sweet proof that you are chosen of God.

Are you Christlike or do you want to be? Can you forgive your enemy and can you love him and do him good? Can you say tonight, “I am no more any man’s enemy than is the babe that is new born”? And do you now desire to live unselfishly, to live for others, to live for God? Are you prayerful? Do you come to God in prayer as Jesus did? Are you careful of your words and of your acts as Christ was? I do not ask you if you are perfect, but I do ask whether you follow the Perfect One?

We are to be followers of Christ, if not with equal steps, still with steps that would be equal if they could. If we follow Christ, that will be to others one of the surest proofs of our election, though perhaps to ourselves, if we are humble-minded, it will be no proof, since we shall rather see our blemishes than our virtues and mourn over our sins more than we rejoice in our graces.

If a man follow not Christ, those who look on may be safe enough in concluding that, whatever he may say about election, and however much he may prate about it, he is not the Lord’s. On that point I shall not say anything more because I have already enlarged upon it in a former part of the discourse.

In the last place I will say, *the fourth evidence is the existence of spiritual joy in spiritual service.* If you look further, it seems that those of whose election the apostle was sure, received the Word of God “in much affliction,” but “with joy in the Holy Ghost.” What do you say about this, you whose religion consists of a slavish attendance upon forms that you detest? Look how many there are who go to a place of worship just because it is not respectable to stay away, but who often wish it were.

And when many of your Christians get on the Continent, where is the Sabbath with them then? Where is then their care for God’s house? See, too, with what misery some people at home go up to the house of the Lord. Why? Because they have come to regard it as a place where they ought to be very solemn. It is not a home to them—it is a prison.

How different it is with your children when they come home for their holidays. How do they come into their father’s house? Dull, demure, as if they could not speak? No, bless their little hearts, they come running up to their father’s knees, so glad to be there, so glad to be home. That is how a man whose religion is his delight comes up to the house of the Lord. He feels that it is his Father’s house. He would be reverent, for his Father is God, but he must be happy, for God is his Father.

See again the Christian when he goes to his closet. Ungodly persons will not go there at all. Or, if they do, it is because they want to win heaven by it. But see, they go through their dreary prayers—and what a dreary thing it must be for a man to pray when he never expects to be heard and when he has no spirit of prayer! It is like a horse going round a mill grinding for somebody else and never getting any farther—doing the same tomorrow, the same the day after, and ever on and on.

Sometimes as the little church bells sound in the morning in certain churches, to fetch people out—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, there are some persons to be found there for early prayers, and they go to evening prayers too, and a very good thing this would be, if those who attend went there with holy joy. But there is the sexton and he says it is a great trouble to be always opening the doors like that when nobody comes except three old women that have got alms-houses, and two that expect them, and are therefore there.

Do you think that an acceptable service to God? But they who go because they would not stay away if they could—they who worship God because it is an instinct, and a pleasure, a holy thing and honorable—these are men and women who delight in God’s Word and they give the best evidence of being chosen of God.

Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, who make your faces miserable that you may appear unto men to fast. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that reads the heart asks not that your head may hang down like a bulrush, but that you may do deeds of mercy, and walk humbly with your God, and you who can delight yourselves in your God, shall have the desires of your heart. You that rejoice in the Lord always, and triumph in His name, shall go from strength to strength, and going at last to glory, you shall find that you came there as the result of His divine purpose and decree, and you shall give Him all the praise.

But now, I think I hear some say, “Oh, I want to know whether *I* am elect. I cannot say that the Word ever came to me with power, I cannot say I received it in much assurance, I cannot say I am a follower of Christ, I cannot say I have received the Word with joy.” Well, dear brother, then leave that question alone.

Instead of that, let me propound another, “Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Will you now trust Christ to save your soul?” He will do it, if, just as you are, whoever you may be, you will come to Christ, and give yourself up to Him to save you, to have you, to hold you for better, for worse, in life and through death. The moment you believe, you are saved.

That act of faith, through the precious blood of Christ, will put away your every sin. You will not begin to be saved—you *are* saved. You will not be put into a salvable condition, but you shall be saved the moment you believe—completely and perfectly saved.

“Oh,” says one, “I would I could trust Christ.” Say you so, man? “Whosoever will, let him take,” let him trust Christ. God help you now to do it. Trust Jesus and you are saved. This is addressed to every one of you without exception, for, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.” The Lord help you to trust Jesus and then you may go on your way with joy, “knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.”

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 CORINTHIANS 9:22-27

The apostle Paul is here giving a description of the way in which he made everything help toward the fulfillment of his desire to be a faithful minister of Jesus Christ. He longed to be the means of winning souls. He desired that, at the last, his Master might be able to say to him, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” And therefore, everything with which he had to do was made to bend in that direction.

22-24. *I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?*

No matter if twenty or a hundred had entered for the race, “but one receiveth the prize.” Alas! out of those who appear to be running in the Christian ministry, how many will be prize-takers at the last? And out of those who seem to be running the race of the Christian life, how many will win the prize? Ah, Lord, You know!

24. *So run, that ye may obtain.*

Do not speculate about what others will do, or not do, but see to your own running—“So run that ye may obtain.” Salvation is all of grace, but when a man is saved, he still has to run the Christian race and to be a runner as long as he lives.

25. *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.*

Here Paul is alluding to the athletic games and pugilistic encounters of the time. It was a matter of common notoriety that every man who was going to fight, or wrestle, or run, had to get himself into proper condition—to “go into training,” as we say in similar cases nowadays.

25. *Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we for an incorruptible.*

The athletes, who completed in the Grecian games, passed through great self-denials and mortifications of the flesh in order that every part of their bodily frame might be tough and strong when they came forward to wrestle, or to run, or to fight. “Now,” says Paul, “if they do all that to gain a crown of parsley”—which was generally the crown given—truly, “a corruptible crown”—“how much more ought we to do in order to win a crown that fadeth not away—‘an incorruptible crown’!”

26. *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:*

He would not leave a stone unturned, as it were, that he might gain the prize. He put out all his strength in the name of the Lord.

27. *But I keep under my body and bring it into subjection:*

The Greek word, according to some, implies getting his body into the same position as a man does when, in a pugilistic encounter, he gets his adversary’s head under his arm, and smites him with all his might. So Paul says concerning his body, “I bring it into subjection and take care that it feels the full force of my will.” According to other interpreters, the verse may be read, “I drag my body off as a slave”—just as in some of those ancient fights, the victors dragged away their antagonists as slaves, Paul accounted his body to be as a slave to his soul, and dragged it behind him in chains.

27. *Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*

The Greek word, which is translated “a castaway,” is “*adokimos*.” It might better have been rendered, “disapproved.” It certainly has no such meaning as that which has been generally given to it. Paul was not afraid of being cast away by God at the last. What he aimed at was this—as he had entered the lists, as a Christian minister, to fight for Christ, to wrestle against principalities and powers, to seek to win souls for Christ, he must keep his bodily powers and passions so in subjection that, at the last, when the prizes were distributed, he would be found to have won his.

This is quite another matter from being “a castaway” from salvation and eternal life. Paul was saved and he knew it—and some of us know, to a certainty, that we are saved—but we also know that there is another crown to be won, which the Lord will give to His servants who win in the great fight with sin. To win this crown is our high ambition and we long to hear the Master say to each one of us, in that day, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

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