

GLORIOUS PREDESTINATION

NO. 1043

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the First-Born among many brethren.”
Romans 8:29.

You will have noticed that in this chapter, Paul has been expounding a very deep inward, spiritual experience. He has written concerning the spirit of bondage, and the spirit of adoption; the infirmities of the flesh, and the help of the Holy Spirit; the waiting for the redemption of the body, and the groans which cannot be uttered. It was most natural, therefore, that a deep spiritual experience should bring him to a clear perception of the doctrines of grace, for such an experience is a school in which alone those great truths of God are effectually learned. A lack of depth in the inner life accounts for most of the doctrinal error in the church. Sound conviction of sin, deep humiliation on account of it, and a sense of utter weakness and unworthiness naturally conduct the mind to the belief of the doctrines of grace, while shallowness in these matters leaves a man content with a superficial creed. Those teachings which are commonly called Calvinistic doctrines are usually most beloved and best received by those who have had much conflict of soul, and so have learned the strength of corruption and the necessity of divine grace.

Note, also, that Paul in this chapter has been treating of the sufferings of this present time, and though by faith he speaks of them as very inconsiderable compared with the glory to be revealed; yet we know that they were not inconsiderable in his case. He was a man of many trials; he went from one tribulation to another for Christ's sake; he swam through many seas of affliction to serve the church. I do not wonder, therefore, that in his epistles he often discourses upon the doctrines of foreknowledge and predestination, and eternal love because these are a rich cordial for a fainting spirit. To be cheered under many things which otherwise would depress him, the Believer may betake himself to the matchless mysteries of the grace of God which are wines on the lees well refined! Sustained by distinguishing grace, a man learns to glory in tribulations, and strengthened by electing love, he defies the hatred of the world and the trials of life. Suffering is the college of orthodoxy. Many a Jonah who now rejects the doctrines of the grace of God only needs to be put into the whale's belly, and he will cry out with the soundest free grace advocate—“Salvation is of the Lord.” Prosperous professors, who do no business amid David's billows and waterspouts, may set small store by the blessed anchorage of eternal purpose and everlasting love, but those who are “tossed with tempest, and not comforted, are of another mind.” Let these few sentences suffice for a preface; I utter them not in the spirit of controversy, but the reverse.

Our text begins by the expression, “Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate,” and many senses have been given to this word, “foreknow,” though in this case one commends itself beyond every other. Some have thought that it simply means that God predestinated men whose future history He did foreknow; the text before us cannot be so understood, because the Lord foreknows the history of every man, and angel, and devil. So far as mere prescience goes, every man is foreknown, and yet no one will assert that all men are predestinated to be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus. But it is further asserted that the Lord foreknew who would exercise repentance, who would believe in Jesus, and who would persevere in a consistent life to the end. This is readily granted, but a reader must wear very powerful magnifying glasses before he will be able to discover that sense in the text! Upon looking carefully at my Bible, I do not perceive such a statement; where are those words which you have added, “Whom He did foreknow *to repent, to believe, and to persevere in grace?*” I do not find them either in the English version or in the Greek original. If I could so read them, the passage would certainly be very easy,

and would very greatly alter my doctrinal views! But, as I do not find those words there, begging your pardon, I do not believe in them; however wise and advisable a human interpolation may be, it has no authority with us; we bow to Holy Scripture, not to glosses which theologians may choose to put upon it. No hint is given in the text of foreseen virtue any more than of foreseen sin, and, therefore, we are driven to find another meaning for the word. We find that the word “*know*” is frequently used in Scripture, not only for knowledge, but also for favor, love, and complacency. Our Lord Jesus Christ will say, in the judgment, concerning certain persons, “I never *knew* you,” yet in a sense He knew them, for He knows every man! He knows the wicked as well as the righteous, but there the meaning is, “I never knew you in such a respect as to feel any complacency in you, or any favor towards you.” See also John 10:14, 15, and 2 Timothy 2:19. In Romans 11:2, we read, “God has not cast away His people which He foreknew,” where the sense evidently has the idea of fore-love, and it is so to be understood here. Those whom the Lord looked upon with favor as He foresaw them, He has predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. They are, as Paul puts it in his letter to the Ephesians, “predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His will.”

I am anxious not to tarry over controverted matters, but to reach the subject of my sermon this morning. Here we have in the text, *conformity to Christ* spoken of as *the aim of predestination*; we have, secondly, *predestination as the impelling force by which this conformity is to be achieved*; and we have, thirdly, *the First-Born Himself set before us as the ultimate end of the predestinations and of the conformity*—“That HE might be the First-Born among many brethren.”

I. Mark then, with care, that OUR CONFORMITY TO CHRIST IS THE SACRED OBJECT OF PREDESTINATION. Into predestination itself I will not now pry; the deeper things shall be left with God. I think it was Bishop Hall who once said, “I thank God I am not of His counsels, but I am of His court.” If I cannot understand, I will not question, for I am not His counselor; but I will adore and obey, for I am, by His grace, His servant. Now today, seeing we are here taught the object of His predestination, it will be our business to labor after it—to bless God that He has set such an object before Him, and pray that *we* may be partakers in it. Here stands the case. Man was originally made in the image of God, but by sin he has defaced that privilege, and now we who are born into this world are fashioned, not in the heavenly image of God, but in the earthy image of the fallen Adam. “We have borne,” says the apostle, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, “the image of the earthy.” The Lord, in boundless grace, has resolved that a company, whom no man can number, called here, “many brethren,” shall be restored to His image in the particular form in which His eternal Son displays it. To this end Jesus Christ came into the world and bore *our* image, that we, through His grace, might bear *His* image; He became a partaker of our infirmities and sicknesses that we might be partakers of the divine nature in all its excellence and purity. Therefore, the one thing to which the Lord is working us through His Spirit, both by providence and by grace, is the likeness of the Lord from heaven; He is evermore transforming the chosen—removing that defilement of sin, and molding them after the perfect model of His Son, Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who is the First-Born among the “many brethren.”

Now, observe that this conformity to Christ lies in several things. First, we are to be conformed to Him as to our *nature*. What was the nature of Christ, then, as divine? We must not pry into it, but we know that He was verily of the nature of God. “Begotten, not made,” says the Athanasian Creed, and it says truly, too, “Being of one substance with the Father.” Now, we also, though we at our conversion are new creatures, are also said to be, “Begotten again into a lively hope.” To be begotten is something more than to be made; this is a more personal work of God, and that which is begotten is in closer affinity to Him than that which is only created. As Christ was, as the Only-Begotten of the Father, far above mere creatures, so also to be begotten of God, in *our* case, means far more than even the *first* and perfect creation could imply. As to His humanity, our blessed Lord, when He came into this world, underwent a birth which was a remarkable type of our second birth; He was born into this world in a very humble place, amidst the oxen and in the manger, but He lacked not the songs of angels, and the adoration of the heavenly hosts! Even so, we, also, were born of the Spirit without human observation—men of this world saw no glory whatever in our regeneration, for it was not performed by mystic rites, or with sacerdotal pomp. The Spirit of God found us in our low estate, and quickened us without outward display;

yet at that same moment, where human eyes saw nothing, seraphic eyes beheld marvels of divine grace, and angels in heaven rejoiced over one sinner who repented, singing once again—"Glory to God in the highest!" When our Lord was born, a few choice spirits welcomed His birth; an Anna and a Simeon were ready to take the new-born child into their arms and bless God for Him, and even so there were some that hailed *our* new birth with much thanksgiving. Friends and well-wishers who had watched for our salvation were glad when they beheld in us the true heavenly life, and gladly did they take us up into the arms of Christian nurture! Perhaps, also, there was one who had travailed in birth till Christ was formed in us the hope of glory, and how happy was that spirit to see us born unto God! How did our spiritual parent ponder each gracious word which we uttered, and thank God for the good signs of grace which could be found in our conversation! Then, too, a worse than Herod sought to kill us; Satan was eager that the new-born child of grace should be put to death, and therefore sent forth fierce temptations to slay us. But the Lord found a shelter for our infant spiritual life, and preserved the young child alive; in us the living and incorruptible Seed abode and grew. As many of you as have been born-again have been conformed to the image of Christ in the matter of His birth, and you are now partakers of His nature, it is not possible for us to be divine, yet it is written that we are made "Partakers of the divine nature." We cannot be precisely as God is, yet as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly, whatever that image may be. The new birth as surely stands us with the image of Christ as our first birth impressed us with a resemblance to the fathers of our flesh. Our first birth gave us humanity; our second birth allies us with Deity. As we were conceived in sin at the first, and shaped in iniquity, even so in regeneration our new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created us. He who sanctifies, and they who are sanctified are all of one—for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

Furthermore, this conformity to Christ lies in *relationship* as well as in nature. Our Lord is the Son of the Highest—the Son of God! And truly, beloved, we are now the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like He, for we shall see Him as He is. Jehovah has declared that He will be a Father to us, and that we shall be His sons and His daughters. As surely as Jesus is a Son, so surely are we, for the same Spirit bears witness to both, as it is written, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." When Jesus came into the world as God's Son, He was not left without attesting proofs; His first public appearance, when He came to the waters of baptism, was signaled by a voice out of the excellent glory which said, "This is My beloved Son," and the descending Spirit, like a dove, rested upon Him. So is it also with us. The voice of God in the Word has testified to us our heavenly Father's love, and the Holy Spirit has borne witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. When first we dared to come forward and say, "We are on the Lord's side," some of us had sacred tokens of sonship which have never been forgotten by us; and oftentimes, since then, we have received renewed seals of our adoption from the great Father of our spirits. "He who believes on the Son has the witness in himself," so that he can, with his brethren, say plainly, "We know that we have passed from death unto life." God has given us full assurance, and infallible testimony, and in all this we rejoice; we have believed in Jesus, and it is written, "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed on His name."

Our Lord was declared to be the Son of God by the actions which He performed, both towards God, and towards man; as a Son He served His Father; you could see the nature of God in Him; in His deep sympathy with God, and in His exact imitation of God. Whatever God would have done under the circumstances, Jesus did. You perceive at once, by His deeds, that His nature was Godlike. His works bore witness of Him; it was most clear that He acted towards God as a son towards a father. Now in proportion as God's determination has been carried out in us, we also act to God as children towards a loving father; and whereas the children of darkness speak of their own, and like their father, who is a liar, speak the lie, and like their father, who is a murderer, act out wrath and bitterness—even so the children of God speak the truth, for God is true, and they are full of love, for God is love; and their life is light, for their God is light; they feel that they must act, under the circumstances in which they are placed, as they would suppose Jesus would have acted, who is the Son of the ever-blessed Father. Moreover, Christ

worked miracles of mercy towards men which proved Him to be the Son of God. It is true we can work no miracles, yet we can do works which mark God's children. We cannot break the bread and multiply it; we can, however, generously distribute what we have, and thus, in feeding the hungry, we shall prove ourselves children of our Father who is in heaven. We cannot heal the diseased with our touch, still we can care for the sick, and so in love towards the suffering, we can prove ourselves to be children of the tender and ever-pitiful God. But our Lord has told us that greater works than His own shall we do because He is gone to His Father—and these greater works we do. We can work *spiritual* miracles. Today, can we not stand at the grave of the dead sinner, and say, "Lazarus, come forth?" And has not God often made the dead to rise at our word, by the power of His Spirit? Today, also, we can preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, casting it about us as if it were our garment, and he who touches the hem thereof, shall he not also be made whole today, even as when Jesus was among men? This day, if we do not break fish and barley loaves, we bring you better food; this day, if we cannot give to men opened eyes and un-stopped ears, yet in the teaching of the gospel of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, the mental eye is cleansed, and the soul's ear also is purged—so that in every child of God, in proportion as he labors in the power of the Spirit for Christ—the works which he does bear witness of him that he is a son of God! His zeal in doing them proves that he has the spirit of a child of God, and the result of those works proves that God works in him as He will never do in any but His own children. Thus, in relationship, as well as in nature, we are conformed to the image of Christ!

Thirdly, we are to be conformed to the image of Christ in our *experience*. This is the part of the subject from which our cowardly spirit often shrinks, but if we were wise it would not be so. What was the experience of Christ in this world? That ours will be! We may sum it up as referring to God, to men, to the devil, and to all evil. His experience with regard to God; what was that? "Though He were a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." Though without sin, He was not without suffering; the First-Born of the divine family was more sorely chastened than any other of the household. He was smitten of God and afflicted till, as the climax of all, He cried *Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabacthani?* Oh, the bitterness of that cry—"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It was the Father bruising the First-Born Son! And, if you and I, brothers and sisters, are to be conformed to the image of the First-Born, though we may expect from God much fatherly love, we may also reckon that it will show itself in parental discipline. If you are without chastisement, where all are partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons! But, if you are true sons, like the First-Born, the rod will make you smart, and sometimes you will have to say, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chastens not?" If we are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, the Lord has predestinated us to much tribulation, and through it shall we inherit the kingdom!

Next survey our dear covenant head in His experience in relation to men. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." "He was despised and rejected of men." He said, "Reproach has broken My heart, and I am full of heaviness." Now beloved, in the very proportion in which we are conformed to the image of Christ we shall have to "Go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach." The disciple, if he is a true disciple, is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord; if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they call them of His household by some yet more opprobrious title if they can invent it. The saints of God must not expect crowns where Christ found a cross; they must not reckon to ride in triumph through those streets which saw the Savior hurried to a malefactor's death; we must suffer with Him if we would be glorified with Him; fellowship in His sufferings is necessary to communion with His glory.

Then, consider our Lord's experience with regard to the prince of the power of the air. Satan was no friend to Christ, but finding Him in the desert, he came to Him with this accursed "if"—"If you are the Son of God." With that attack upon His Sonship, the fiend commenced the battle. "If you are the Son of God"; you know how thrice he assailed Him with those temptations which are most likely to be attractive to poor humanity, but Jesus overcame them all. The arch enemy, the old dragon was always nibbling at the heel of our great Michael, who has forever crushed his head. We are predestinated to be con-

formed to Christ in that respect—the serpent’s subtlety and cruelty will assail us, also, for a tempted head involves tempted members. Satan desires to have us, and to sift us as wheat; he attacked the Shepherd and he will never cease to worry the sheep. Inasmuch as we are of the seed of the woman, there must be enmity between us and the seed of the serpent.

And, as to all evil, our Lord’s entire life was one perpetual battle; He was fighting evil in the high places, and evil in the low, evil among the priests, and evil among the people, evil in a religious dress, in Phariseeism, and evil in the dress of philosophy among the Sadducees. He fought it everywhere; He was the foe of everything that was wrong, false, selfish, unholy, or impure; and you and I must be conformed to Christ in this respect. We are to be holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners; you are of God, little children, and the whole world lies in the wicked one. We are chosen out of the world to be a peculiar people, adversaries to all evil, never sheathing our sword till we enter into our rest; we are to be like He, then, in nature, in relation, in experience.

Fourthly. We are to be conformed to Christ Jesus as to His *character*. Time and ability alike fail us to speak of this; I only pray that God’s Spirit may make our *lives* to speak of it. He was consecrated to God—so are we to be. The zeal of God’s house ate Him up—so should it consume us, also. He went about His Father’s business—so should we ever be occupied. Towards man He was all love—it becomes us to be the same. He was gentle and kind and tender—as He was, so are we to be in this world. He did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax—neither should we; yet was He stern in the denunciation of all evil—so should we be. Purity, holiness, unselfishness—all the virtues should glow in us as they shone in Him. Ah, and blessed be God they will, too, by the work of the Spirit! Our text speaks not only of what we ought to be, but of what we *shall* be, for we are *predestinated* to be conformed to the image of God’s Son! My brothers and sisters, what a glorious model! Behold it! Wonder at it! And bless God for it! You are not to be conformed to the mightiest of the apostles—you will one day be purer than were Paul or John while here below! You are not to be conformed to the most sublime of the prophets—you shall be like the prophets’ Master! You are not to be content with your own conception of that which is beautiful and lovely—God’s perfect conception Incarnated in His own Son is that to which you shall certainly be brought by the predestination of God!

Just a sentence upon another point. We are to be conformed to the image of His Son, fifthly, as to our *inheritance*, for He is heir of all things, and what less are we heirs of, since all things are ours? He is Heir of this world. “You made Him to have dominion over all the works of Your hands: You have put all things under His feet, all sheep and oxen, yes, and the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea, and whatever passes through the paths of the sea.” We see not yet all things put under man, but we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor; and in the person of Christ Jesus this day we, the men who are made in His image, have dominion over all things, being all made kings and priests unto God, and in Christ Jesus ordained to reign with Him forever and ever! “If children then heirs,” says the apostle; therefore, whatever Christ has we have, and though we may be very poor and unknown, yet whatever belongs to Christ belongs to us. “The good of all the land of Egypt is yours,” said Joseph to his brothers, and Jesus says this to all His people, “All are yours, for you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”

I must close this point—time goes much too swiftly this morning when speaking upon this delightful theme. By observing that we are to be conformed to Christ in His *glory*, we will think of our bodies, for that is a point surrounded with consolation, since He shall change our vile body, and make it like unto His glorious body! We are like Adam, now, in weakness and pain, and we shall soon be like he in death—returning to the ground where we were taken; but we shall rise again to a better life! And then shall we wear in glory and incorruption the image of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven! Conceive the beauties of the risen Redeemer! Let your faith and your imagination work together to portray the unutterable glories of Immanuel, God With Us, as He sits at the right hand of the Father—such and so bright shall our glories be in the day of the redemption of the body! We shall behold His glory! We shall be with Him where He is, and we shall be, ourselves, glorious in His glory! Is He exalted? You also shall be lifted up! Is He King? You shall not be uncrowned! Is He a victor? You also shall bear a palm!

Is He full of joy and rejoicing? So, also, shall your soul be filled to the brim with delights! Where He is, every saint shall be before long!

Thus much upon the sacred end of predestination.

II. Now, observe that PREDESTINATION IS THE IMPELLING FORCE TOWARDS THIS CONFORMITY. This truth of God divides itself thus—it is the *will* of God that conforms us to Christ's image rather than our own will. It is our will now, but it was God's will when it was not our will, and it only became according to our will when we were converted, because God's grace had made us willing in the day of its power. We cannot be made like Christ unwillingly—a consenting will is essential to the likeness of Christ! Unwilling obedience would be disobedience. *Naturally* we never will towards good without God, but God works in us to will and to do; God treats us as men responsible and intelligent, and not as stone or metal; He made us free agents, and He treats us as such. We are willing now to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Yes, we are *more* than willing—we are anxious and desirous for it! But still the main and first motive power lay not in our will, but in His will, and today the immutable force which is best to be depended upon does not lie in our fickle, feeble will, but in the unchanging and omnipotent will of God; the force that is conforming us to Christ is the will of God in predestination!

And so, too, it is rather God's *work* than our work. We are to work *with* God in the matter of our becoming like Christ; we are not to be passive like wood or marble; we are to be prayerful, watchful, fervent, diligent, obedient, earnest and believing, but still the work is God's. Sanctification is the Lord's work in us. "You have worked all our works in us." From the first, and now, and to the last, "He that has worked us to the same thing is God, who also has given to us the earnest of the Spirit." There is no holiness in us of our own creating; there is no good thing in us of our own fashioning. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto Your name be praise." Still, true as it is that we are free agents, yet the Lord is the potter, and we are the clay upon the wheel, and it is His work, and not ours, that makes us like Christ. If there is a touch of our finger anywhere upon the vessel, it mars and does not beautify; it is only where God's hand has been, that the vessel begins to assume the form of the model. Therefore beloved, all the *glory* must be unto God, and not to us. It is a great honor to any man to be like Christ; God does not intend that His children should have no honor, for He puts honor upon His own people, but the true glory lies with Him, since He has made us. Cannot we say, this morning, with thankful hearts, "By the grace of God I am what I am?" And do we not feel that we shall lay all our honors, whatever they may be, at His dear feet who has, according to His abundant mercy, predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son?

III. Now I must come to the third point with brevity. It sweetly appears that the ULTIMATE END OF ALL THIS IS CHRIST. "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that HE"—"that HE"—God is always driving at something for Him, His well-beloved Son. He aims at His own glory in the glory of His dear Son. If He blesses us, the text of last Sunday [See Sermon #1041, MERCY'S MASTER MOTIVE] is still true, "Not for your sakes do I this." It is for the sake of a higher, a better One than we are—it is "That He might be the First-Born." Now, if I understand the passage before us, it means this. First, God predestinates us to be like Jesus that His dear Son might be the first of a new order of beings elevated above all other creatures, and nearer to God than any other existences. He was Lord of angels, seraphim, and cherubim who obeyed His behests. But the Son desired to be at the head of a race of beings more nearly allied to Him than any existing spirits. There was no kinship between the Lord Jesus and angels, for to which of the angels had the Father said at any time, "You are My Son?" They are, by nature, servants, and He is the Son—this is a wide distinction. The eternal Son desired association with beings who should be sons as He was, towards whom He could stand in a close relationship as being like to them in nature and Sonship. And the Father, therefore, ordained that a seed that He had chosen should be conformed to the image of the Son that His Son might head up and be chief among an order of beings more nearly akin to God than any other. The serpent said to Eve, "God knows that you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." That lie had in it a residue of truth, for by Sovereign grace we have become such. There were no obedient creatures in the world of that sort, knowing good and evil, in the days of Eden's glory. The angels in heaven had known good, and only good, and preserved by grace had not fallen. The evil spirit had fallen, and he knew evil, but he had forgotten good and was incapable

of ever choosing it again; he is now forever banished from hope of restoration. But here are we who know both good and evil; we understand the one, and the other, too, and now there is begotten in us a nature which loves holiness and cannot sin because it is born of God; we are left free agents, yes, we are freer than ever we were; and yet in this life, and in the life to come, our path is like that of the just which shines more and more unto the perfect day! Angels know not evil; they have never had to battle with evil known and felt within; they have not tried the paths of sinful pleasure, and through grace they are turned from them so as with full purpose of heart they cleave to holiness forever. Jesus now heads a race assailed but victorious—sorely tempted, but enabled to overcome! Joyfully and cheerfully forever shall it be our delight to do the Father's will; forever with Christ at our head, we shall be the nearest to the eternal throne; the most attached of servants, because also sons; the most firmly adhesive to good, because we once knew the bitterness of evil! Even as Christ had to drink the cup of suffering for sin, we also have sipped of it; we have known horror caused by guilt, and, therefore, for the future shall be throughout eternity a nobler race, freer to serve, and serving God after a nobler fashion than any other creatures in the universe! I take it that it is the meaning of the text that the Lord would have Christ to be the first of a nobler order of beings.

But, secondly, the object of grace is that there may be some in heaven with whom Christ can hold brotherly converse. Note the expression, "Many brethren"—not that He might be the First-Born among many, but among "many brethren," who should be like He. Our blessed Lord delights in fellowship; such is the greatness of His heart that He would not be alone in His glory, but would have associates in His happiness. Now, I speak with bated breath. God can do all things, but I see not any way by which He could give to His only-begotten Son beings that should be akin to Him except through the processes which we discover in the economy of divine grace. Here are beings that know evil, and know also good; here are beings placed under infinite obligations by bonds of love and gratitude to choose forever the good; here are beings with a nature so renewed that they always must be holy beings—and these beings can commune with the incarnate God upon *suffering* as angels cannot! They can discuss upon the penalty of *guilt* as angels cannot; upon heart-throes, conflicts, reproaches, and brokenness of spirit as angels cannot; and to them the Lord Jesus can reveal the glory of holiness, the bliss of conquering sin, and the sweetness of benevolence as only they can comprehend! Renewed men are made fit companions for the Son of God! He shall feast all the more joyously because they shall eat bread with Him in His kingdom; He shall be joyful when He declares the Lord's name unto His brethren! He shall joy in their joy, and be glad in their gladness.

No doubt, however, the text means that these will forever love and honor the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The children look up to the first-born. In the East the first-born is the lord and king of the household. We love Jesus now, and esteem Him our head and chief. How will we, when we once get to heaven, love and adore Him as our dear elder brother with whom we shall be on terms of the closest familiarity, and most reverent obedience! How joyfully will we serve Him! How rapturously adore Him! Shall we not need to have our voices made louder till they become as thunder, or like many waters, or surely we shall not be able to praise Him as we would? If there is work to do for Him in future ages, we will be the first to volunteer for service; if there are battles to be fought in times to come with other rebellious races; if there are servants needed to fly over the vast realms of the infinite to carry Jehovah's messages—who shall fly so swiftly as we shall when once we feel that in His courts we shall dwell not as mere servants, but as members of the royal family, partakers of the divine nature, nearest to God Himself? What bliss to know that He, who is "Very God of very God," and sits on the eternal throne, is also of the same nature with ourselves, our kinsman who is not ashamed, even amidst the royalties of glory, to call us brothers and sisters! O brothers and sisters, what honors are ours! What a heritage lies before us! Who among us would change with Gabriel? We shall have no need to envy angels, for what are they but ministering spirits, servants in our Father's halls? We are sons, and sons of no inferior order! No sons of a secondary rank like Abraham's children born of Keturah, or like the son of the bondwoman, but we are the Isaacs of God, born according to the promise! We are heirs of all that He has, a seed beloved of the Lord forever! Oh, what joy ought to fill our spirits, this morning, at the prospect which this text reveals, and which predestination secures!

Perhaps our fullest thought upon the text is this. God was so well-pleased with His Son, and saw such beauties in Him, that He determined to multiply His image. “My Beloved,” He said, “You shall be the model by which I will fashion My noblest creatures; I will, for Your sake, make men able to converse with You, and bound to You by bands of love, shall be next akin to Myself, and in all things like You.” Behold, from heaven’s mint, golden pieces of inestimable value are sent forth, and each one bears the image of the Son of God! The face of Jesus is lovelier to God than all the worlds! His eyes are brighter than the stars! His voice is sweeter than bliss—therefore does the Father will to have His Son’s beauty reflected in 10,000 mirrors in saints made like He, and His praises chanted by myriads of voices of those who love Him because His blood has saved them! The Father knew how happy His Son would be to associate His chosen with Himself, for of old His delights were with the sons of men. As a shepherd loves his sheep, as a king loves his subjects, so Jesus loves to have His people around Him! But deeper, yet, is the mystery, as it is not good for a man to be alone; and as for this cause does a man leave his father and mother, and is joined unto his wife and they are one flesh—even so is it with Christ and His church. He was made like her for her salvation, and now she is made like He for His honor! In what way could the Father put greater honor on His Son than by forming a race like unto Himself who shall be the many brethren among whom He is the well-beloved First-Born?

Now, brothers and sisters, this word I say, and send you home. Keep your model before you! You see what you are to come to, therefore always set Christ before your eyes. You see what you are predestinated to be—aim at it! Aim at it every day. God works and He works in you not to sleep, but to will and to do according to His own good pleasure. Brethren, grieve at your failures! When you see anything in yourselves that is not Christ-like, mourn over it, for it must be put away; it is so much dross that must be consumed; you cannot keep it, for God’s predestination will not let you retain anything about you which is not according to the image of Christ. Cry mightily to the Holy Spirit to continue His sanctifying work in you; beseech Him not to be grieved and vexed, or, in any measure to stay His hand. Cry, “Lord, melt me! Pour me out like wax and set Your seal upon me until the image of Christ is clearly there.” Above all, commune much with Christ; communion is the fountain of conformity. Live with Christ, and you will soon grow like Christ. They said of Achilles, the greatest of the Grecian heroes, that when he was a child, they fed him upon lion’s marrow and so made him brave. Feed upon Christ and be Christ-like. The record, on the other hand, of blood-thirsty Nero, is that he became so because he was suckled by a woman of a ferocious, barbaric nature. If we drink in our nutriment from the world, we shall be worldly—but if we live upon Christ, and dwell in Him, our conformity with Him shall be readily accomplished, and we shall be recognized as brothers and sisters of that blessed family of which Jesus Christ is the First-Born. How I wish everyone here had a share in the text! I mourn that some have not, for he that believes not on the Son has not life, and therefore cannot have conformity to a living Christ! God grant to you all to be believers in Christ, now and forever. Amen and amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
ROMANS 8:16-30; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:39-58.**

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