

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE.*

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Eph. 1.3-6. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; 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 with 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."

These words form part of what has been called Paul's psalm of thanksgiving to God for the spiritual blessings we enjoy through faith in Christ. The "psalm" includes v.v. 3-14, or, more particularly 4-14; verse 3 forming the prelude to the "psalm" and giving us the key-note of the whole. In this "psalm" the apostle surveys the whole course of God's redeeming grace. First, he views it as it was conceived in the mind of God "before the foundation of the world"; then he sees that thought developed, having become a reality in the experience and lives of men on earth, and then he looks forward to final redemption when we become "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Thus the "psalm" is divided into three parts, each of which closes with the words "To the praise of his glory," as a sort of refrain. The words of the text comprise the first division and suggest three main thoughts:

I.—The prelude, v. 3. The one thought that we wish to emphasize is the title that is here given to God. In the Old Testament, words such as these could never be ascribed to Him. We find many glorious titles, titles which have at once filled men with reverence and awe and humility. But not until we step across into the New Testament dispensation do we read "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ascribing blessing and honor and glory to God has been ever of old. "When the morning stars sang together" at creation's dawn, this song is first heard upon earth and until the present day it has never ceased amidst all the tumults and noises of earth. All nature renders glory to God, consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or involuntarily:

"All Thy works shall praise Thy name
In earth and sky and sea."

"The heavens declare the glory of God
and the firmament sheweth his handy-
work," all declaring that "the hand that made us is divine."

II.—The great doctrine propounded—the doctrine of the election of grace. Perhaps no doctrine has met with such bitter opposition as the doctrine of election. It has been fearfully misunderstood for some reason or other—probably prejudice more than anything else. Many oppose and disbelieve a doctrine which they cannot by any means refute. If we were perfectly candid it should not be a point with us whether a doctrine is liked or disliked, whether it is believed or unbelieved, but whether it is taught by the word of God. That this doctrine is taught by the word of God no candid person will deny. Our text declares it, without the shadow of a doubt; and while we do not hold that a belief in this doctrine is essential to salvation—does not determine the future or even the present state of any man—still we think it to be so important that in maintaining our view we advance with all courage and fer-

veny of spirit because it is a part of God's holy word. We firmly believe that the doctrine of election to salvation in Jesus Christ is a doctrine set forth in the Scriptures. Paul declares that the community of the redeemed was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. v.v. 4, 5. In Revelations we read that our names were "written in the book of life before the foundation of the world." 17:8, and very many other passages could be quoted that declare the same doctrine. Not that we are able to explain this mystery of salvation, a mystery as far as the possibility of explanation is concerned, but not as to the fact. Paul himself did not attempt to explain it. He simply "sooke as he was moved by the Holy Ghost." He did not try to harmonize the doctrine of election with man's free agency. His reply to all questions touching the justice of God's administration in the election of grace is found in verse 5, "according to the good pleasure of His will." To Paul's mind that was satisfactory and conclusive. And Jesus Himself used the same expression. "Even so Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight."

Salvation, then, is by mere grace, in the fullest sense and most comprehensive meaning of the term. When the apostle declares in the next chapter that salvation is by grace, through faith, he adds: "And that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"; thus prohibiting the Christian believer from robbing God of any portion, however small, of His grace and glory and arrogating it to himself. We were all children of wrath by nature, "but God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, hath quickened us together with Christ; by grace ye are saved." All that the Father hath given to Christ shall come to Christ, the Father will lead them to Christ, so that Christ's death may not be in vain, so that Christ shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Christ's sheen will be taught to know His voice and will follow Him. "No man cometh unto me, except it were given him of my Father." Such are some of the passages of scripture that declare this doctrine.

We believe in sovereign love—that long before the foundation of the world, God in His love and mercy hath elected some to everlasting life. We believe in salvation by the grace of God without works, but not in condemnation without sin. We believe in election to salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but we do not believe in the wretched doctrine of reprobation without sin.

Many are anxious to know if they belong to the elect. Many would like to get a glimpse into the book of life to see if their names are written there, but that book is a closed book to us. We cannot peer into its pages. As regards this matter, the things only which are revealed belong to us; and these are, "repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and holiness of heart and life through the spirit." These are the things to which the gospel of the grace of God calls men, and the elect of God are known by their repenting and by their believing and by their praying to God day and night. Most vain and ignorant is he who rests his hope of salvation upon any fancy or groundless presumption that he is one of the elect; and if possible he is yet more vain and ignorant who resigns himself to despair, on supposition of not being one of the elect.

This glorious doctrine has this excellency that it produces the holiest and staunchest of men. Most of the long line of martyrs believed in this doctrine firmly and believed that "All things worked to-

gether for good to those that love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose." None more holy, more devoted, more loving and more generous can be found anywhere than among the believers in this doctrine.

III. The purpose of this loving foreordination.

It is two-fold. We were chosen.

1. That we should be holy and blameless before Him in love.

2. That we might be adopted into His family.

For this end we were elected of God in the beginning. This was the object God had in view, and all "to the praise of his glory."

So then believers are called upon to be holy, saints, consecrated to the service of God, set apart, not conforming to the world, but being transformed by the renewing of their minds, being separate and not touching the unclean thing, etc.

"Without Blame."—Not that we can be "blameless" here, but we are always to "press on towards the mark," onward and upward, perfecting existing holiness, "cleansing themselves from all defilements of the flesh and spirit." This was one purpose God had in view when He chose us from before the foundation of the world. We were called to holiness and salvation. Then those who were called were called unto adoption of children to God. What a glorious privilege! Sons of God! Adopted into His family, partakers of all the privileges of the sons of God "whereby we cry Abba Father."

Oh, let us "give diligence to make our calling and election sure." It is to a life of faith and of holiness we are called. "Without holiness no man can see the Lord." It is only by a practical life of consistency with faith in Christ Jesus that we have evidence of our interest in election. We are chosen not because we are holy, but because we might be holy; we are chosen not because we are good, but that by the principles of the everlasting gospel, we might become so. When we close with Christ by faith we begin to enter into the purpose of our being, and we live henceforth "to the praise of the glory of His grace."

In the Crimea the British left 60,000 corpses, which are interred in 130 cemeteries on ground occupied by the troops during that long and disastrous war.

One result of the Torrey-Alexander mission in London is that a "revival" has taken place amongst a number of clerks at the War Office, where a class for Bible study has been established.

The Assembly buildings for the Irish Presbyterian Church, erected in Belfast at a cost of £100,000, were formally opened on the 5th inst. by the Duke of Argyll, who made reference in his speech to the Scottish Church ease.

Stavner is to enjoy an experiment in church union this summer. The Presbyterians and the Baptists have decided to hold union services during July and part of August. The Rev. Mr. Allison will leave town next week on his annual vacation, and on the last Sunday in June and the first three Sundays in July the Rev. Mr. Reid, of the Baptist church, will be the pastor and preacher to both Presbyterians and Baptists. During the ensuing four weeks Mr. Reid will be away and Mr. Allison will take charge of the union services. The morning services will be held in the Baptist church and the evening services in the Presbyterian church. This order of things will last from June 25th to August 13th.

*Synopsis of sermon preached in Knox Church, Beaverton, on Sunday morning, 10th June, 1906.