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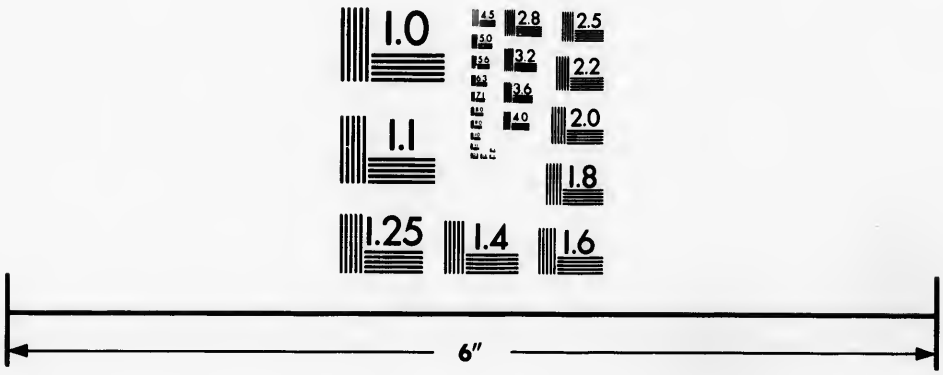

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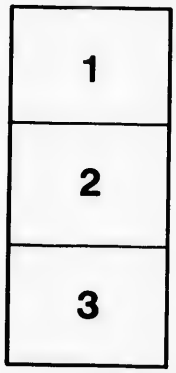

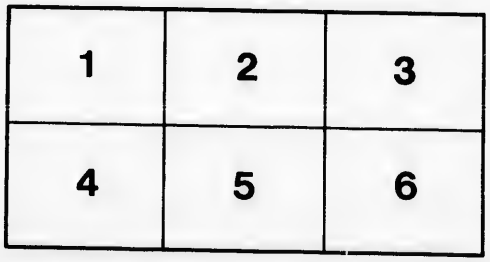

GOD'S DECREE OF ELECTION

NO

Discouragement to Faith,

AND NO

EXCUSE FOR INACTION,

BEING AN

EXPOSITORY DISCOURSE

ON 2 THES. II. 13—17.

DELIVERED IN COTE STREET CHURCH,

MONTREAL,

ON SABBATH, 14TH JUNE, 1868,

BY

M. WILLIS, D.D., L.L.D.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

MONTREAL:
PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF JOHN C. BECKET, 78 GREAT SAINT JAMES STREET.
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Montreal, 17th June, 1868.

Rev. Prin. WILLIS, D.D., L.L.D.

Dear Sir,

We, the undersigned Ministers and Elders, having had the pleasure of hearing you preach last Sabbath Morning, in Cote Street Church, Montreal, beg to request that you will consent to the publication of the excellent Discourse then delivered. We believe that its wide circulation is fitted, under the Divine blessing, to promote the interests of truth and the comfort and edification of God's people.

Yours respectfully,

JAMES COURT,	Elder,	Cote St. Ch.	JOHN STIRLING,	Elder,	Cote St. Ch.
THOMAS MAIR,	Do.	Do.	JAMES ROSS,	Do.	Do.
PHILIP ROSS,	Do.	Do.	ADAM STEVENSON,	Do.	Do.
D. MORRICE,	Do.	Do.	JAMES DAVIDSON,	Do.	Do.
A. MCGOWAN,	Do.	Do.	ARCHD. FERGUSON,	Do.	Do.
JOHN CAMPBELL,	Do.	Do.	F. W. TORRANCE,	Do.	Do.

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D. H. MACVICAR.	JOHN MCDONALD.
JOHN ROSS.	NATHL. PATERSON.
A. WILSON.	W. GREGG.
A. C. MCDONALD.	

Dear Brethren,

A request, so respectably subscribed, though coming upon me unexpected, I could not but meet with favourable consideration.

I consent to hand you the Discourse, hoping that it may in some degree promote the good results you are pleased to anticipate from its publication.

Very truly yours,

In the service of Christ,

M. WILLIS.

To the Rev. D. H. McVicar,
James Court, Esq., and others.

LECTURE

ON

2 *Thessalonians: ch.* 2, *v.* 13–17.

The preceding verses contain one of the plainest predictions of the rise of the Man of Sin, and most striking delineations of the character of that apostacy, to be found in all the Bible. The general consent of Protestant interpreters has referred the passage to the church of Rome; and its agreement with history as to the manner in which the great antichristian system attained to such formidable influence is certainly confirmatory of this interpretation. It may be observed that the Apostle speaks of the subject as one with which the Christians at Thessalonica were familiar, and on which he had discoursed when present with them. "Remember ye not that when I was yet with you, I told you these things; and now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way." The prophet Daniel had foretold the rise of the great spiritual usurpation as coincident with the dismemberment of the Roman Empire, and the Apostle had no doubt pointed the attention of the Church to so remarkable a prediction; since he supposes those to whom he wrote to understand what was yet the let or hinderance to the full development of the Apostacy. Rome Pagan—the empire—still stood, of whose dismemberment when it should occur the Papal power was to take advantage. It is in dreadful terms that the havock this antichristian system should make of men's souls is here described, as well as the diabolical policy by which it should insinuate itself: "Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved." It is not necessary, indeed, to take these words and the following—

"that they all might be damned," as necessarily importing that every adherent of the Papacy is doomed to certain destruction.* But surely it is a very solemn warning of the danger of wilful departure from the truth; for the Apostle at least affirms that where error works its full effect in enslaving the mind and corrupting the heart, it is indeed deadly or damning. Nor are the fatal consequences the less certain, that in righteous judgment a Holy God may have permitted the victims of deadly error to be deceived, yea, has "sent them strong delusions that they should believe a lie:" For still it is, because they received not the love of the truth, and first of all had pleasure in unrighteousness. How relieving it is to find such an awful statement accompanied with so clear a testimony to the certain connection between faith and salvation!—"they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved." This implies that salvation is in very deed brought nigh. How relieving it is also to find, along with this prediction of the dismal night of error that was soon to set in upon the church, so distinct an intimation of its destined close also, or of the sure decline of antichristianism, and its destruction in due season: "that wicked one, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy with the brightness of his coming!"

The Apostle moreover comforts himself with the assured expectation which he felt warranted to entertain, that faithful witnesses should not be wanting in the darkest time, and that these, his converts at Thessalonica, should stand fast in the hour of temptation. It is well, however, to be warned against even the beginnings of spiritual declension; and it is just when one is contemplating the dismal effects of error in those who have never been truly enlightened, that the most intense gratitude should be felt to a gracious Providence, if it has prevented us from the seducing and corrupting influences which might have proved fatal to us no less than to others. This is the spirit that characterizes the apostle's expressions in the verses we have selected for exposition:

* The word literally means "judged,"—yet in the sense of "condemned" as our version takes it.

V. 13, "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord." He does not so much praise or flatter their constancy, as he gives thanks on their account. But neither does he hesitate to tell the elect of their safety. He speaks of all believers as of that number; all who love the truth are saved. In the beginning of the former epistle he had told his Thessalonian converts how he knew their election of God. It was not by any sight granted to him more than to others of the book of the decrees, or of the names written in the book of life; it was by the reception they had given to the gospel, and the fruits it had produced on their lives. But it is very instructive to observe, that Paul rests his confidence of their final well-being and steadfast perseverance on God's unchanging purpose. Nor does he dream of its being unsafe to assure them of their interest in that purpose. We shall see immediately how he guards against an abuse of this doctrine. But mark first, how, so far from concealing his belief of their interest in the decree of love; when he would give expression to his firmest hope of their constancy, it is with this he begins; "Brethren, beloved of the Lord." Such is the designation he applies to them, recognizing in this the surest guarantee for their abiding in the faith:—they were interested in that special love or grace which having eternally chosen them to everlasting life, would not fail to carry on the good work to its consummation. Few passages appear to us more explicit than this, in proving a decree of election, and in demonstrating that the election has been from everlasting; that it respects individuals; that it is free, uncaused, I mean, by the foresight of the faith or good works of some as compared with others; that it is holy withal, including provision for the sanctification as well as salvation and final happiness of the chosen.

"From the beginning," says the Apostle, "he hath chosen you." This is undoubtedly expressive of the eternity of the choice. It was before all time. It is in vain that it has been attempted to give another meaning to the words as if denoting the beginning of the gospel only: for it is matter of history that the Thessalonians had not received the Gospel

from "the beginning," in that sense of the words.* They were later than many others in receiving it. Any reader of the Acts may remember that the Apostles had largely proseeuted the work of their mission in other parts before they were beckoned to go into Macedonia; and Thessalonica was one of the famous Macedonian churches. Besides, the expression—"from the beginning," has its obvious interpretation in parallel passages where we have the same idea, only in different words. Thus in Ephes. 1, 4, "before the foundation of the world," is the phrase used in the very same relation to electing love: "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."

Then, further, the election is "to salvation." It is not merely to the opportunities or means for salvation. To these also, no doubt: they are mentioned anon. But salvation itself is here, and here first—the end before the means. For, that final salvation is to be understood, is plain from this, that the salvation is inclusive of "the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" mentioned in next verse, as the end both of the election and of the calling; and because, moreover, it is distinguished from *sanctification* which, though itself a part of the salvation, is here ranked as a means to the complete end,—"through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth."

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* The interpretation sought to be forced on the words, "in the beginning,"—though supported by Michaelis, has been rejected on critical grounds, by Schott, Ellicott, Lange, &c. The argument briefly is, that such a sense would require some supplementary expression with *arche* (as in Phil. 4, 15,) or obviously involved in the context 1 John 2: 7, 24, see also Dr. Eadie on Eph. 1, 4,) who justly marvels at Adam Clarke finding an allusion in the phrase "from the foundation of the world" to the commencement of the Jewish state. Neander trifles with the subject in a like manner. Calvin rightly saw, long ago, that the Apostle's object was to comfort the elect in all time, as well as christians of the earliest age of the Gospel. The word *heilato* forbids such an unnatural interpretation, (Lange). Indeed no relief is found from the supposed difficulty of those subjects in these theories that suppose a reference merely to a general choice of the Gentiles to the privilege of a Gospel state, for sovereignty must still on this hypothesis be confessed. All nations have not been chosen, and masses of the outwardly called, reject the offered salvation. Surely it was not for a thing of so uncertain result that the Apostle breaks forth in thanksgivings and blessings so fervent!

How interesting to observe the relation among these things! Salvation is first stated comprehensively as the fruit of electing love. But, lest any one should exclaim: Is our safety then irrespective of our holy living? So essential, says the Apostle, is sanctification, that it is no less provided for, no less certainly related to final glory, than is the belief of the truth: nay, so essential is sanctification, that whatever of salvation is enjoyed in the present life may be comprehended under that very word or name. And this Gospel holiness is as much deeper and more thorough than any mere virtue of man, as the divine person who undertakes for it is greater than a mere creature: the love of the Father is carried into effect by "the love of the Spirit."

We seem to miss here "redemption" by the Son. But, besides that "the glory" to be obtained is called the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, I doubt not the word sanctification here is to be taken in its largest extent of meaning, including all that the Spirit as the applier of redemption works in the soul, from its first enlightenment in the knowledge of Christ and union with him, to its highest advances in conformity to his image. Redemption, then, or reconciliation by the cross, is implied. And next to sanctification of the Spirit, comes here "belief of the truth:" before it, no doubt, in the order of our experience. As belonging to the external means, it is, in its own place, as essential as the agency of the Holy Ghost. Let no one say, then, if we are passive in the hands of God, and if salvation, as it would appear, is so independent of us, we may leave ourselves to fate, or wait inactive the will of our sanctifier. No! He who applies redemption—He whose work sanctification is, requires faith as well as inclines us to exercise it. Nor does he pass by the understanding, but acts through the medium of it, presenting the truth to the mind, and enabling us to receive it, and love it,—"through belief of the truth." Not to perceive that truth—by so clear a light does it shine—is represented in the preceding context as the evidence of a heart ill affected to the matter of the truth; and, so, they who perish are said to perish because "they have not received the love of the truth that they might be saved." Sad doom! But their condemnation, observe, is connected with their sin; and however inscrutable to us the decree which abandons

unbelievers to their choice, or leaves them to believe a lie, even these darkest words of the passage or its context imply the most comforting assurance against any mere arbitrary procedure on God's part, or such exercise of absolute sovereignty as might render faith or diligence vain. The election does not take effect but through faith; and none who believes perishes. Effectual calling is the very evidence of electing love; and we need no more than the outward call, the Gospel invitation, to warrant faith:—"whereunto he called you by our Gospel."

"He called you," and "by our Gospel."

The "calling" is inclusive doubtless both of the external and internal or effectual call. The Apostle undoubtedly refers to both in the case of those to whom he was writing—they were such as had believed. But the outward call or invitation had been addressed to them just in common with others. The secret decree of God's love could only be affirmed of them when that outward or common call was complied with. And how expressive of conversion this word "called!" How expressive of the power as well as the sovereignty of grace concerned in that change! He but *calls;* he speaks to the heart—and it is done. "He hath saved us and called us (2 Tim. i.) with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

And we learn too what is the means or instrument in the hand of the Spirit, in this effectual operation. No doubt the whole word of truth—law as well as Gospel—is of use; but emphatically it is said, "by our Gospel." This is the great power of God. This it is which moves, draws the soul; convinced and alarmed by the law—but now only sweetly constrained. "Our Gospel"—the Gospel which I preach—says Paul: and he leaves us at no uncertainty what this was:—"We preach Christ crucified; to the Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness, but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." In the Gospel is eminently beheld the glory of God in the face of Jesus. There is seen provided the righteousness which the

law requires. There conscience finds the satisfying answer to its question, How shall I come before the Lord? There the balm effectual to heal its wounds. Nor are the promises of the Gospel limited to forgiveness. As free as its offer of grace is its promise of glory, and the attainment of it assured to him who believeth. No partial salvation this, nor uncertain, nor conditional; for, observe, it is "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ," we are called. The sacred writer embraces all as possessed by one faith—received on one calling. The very first step on the way of life, once taken, is no surer than the final prize is sure that is yet to be run for and pressed towards. Christ has purchased all, and he gives all or none!

So it is called "his glory,"—that glory transcendant and eternal which he was made perfect through sufferings to bring many sons to enjoy—*his* also, as being in his hand to be dispensed by him in that day. Who is competent to describe that glory? What tongue of man or angel can describe it? No expectation, nor imagination, surely, can exceed what is not so much described as only indicated by this representation of it—it is the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ; a glory which is the reward of the Saviour's merits, and proportional to these; a glory which he has gone into the heavens to receive, and prepare for his people; and which he will give them to enjoy in fellowship with himself eternally. For, says he, "the glory which thou hast given to me I have given to them." How enhanced the sweetness of the reward, that it is to be enjoyed by believers as joint heirs with Christ; given by him, the Lord, the righteous Judge, and secured by their mystical union to his very person! The Apostle lingers on the Saviour's name, every letter in which is precious, as connected with so blessed a prospect:—"the glory of our Lord, Jesus, Christ!"

The conclusion of the passage contains an exhortation and a prayer: very suitable both, as following his words of congratulation or thanksgiving. Just as if the final salvation were uncertain, or conditional, he enjoins "standing fast" as a duty:

and knowing that for all duty assisting grace is needful, he commends his converts to that grace.

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast." Yes, he urges as a motive to diligence and steadfastness, the very knowledge of their interest in the divine love on which he had congratulated them. This is ever the way of the sacred writers. The same Apostle who tells us that the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal—"the Lord knoweth them that are His," adds unhesitatingly as on the obverse, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."—(2 Tim. ii. 19.) Paul does not wait to reconcile these things, or to satisfy every caviller how it can be that the certainty of an interest in the divine love influences the Christian not to abate, but to increase his watchfulness. So John as Paul. He who says, (1 Ep. ii 27), "the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you," says again, (v. 28), "And now, little children, abide in him;" and again, (2 Ep. v. 8), "Look to yourselves that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." Both things are true—throughout all Scripture are recognized as true—the adequacy of the provisions of the covenant of grace, or the unconditional nature of the promises as concerns the end; yet, the necessary relation of the means to the end, or the conditional dependance of one blessing on another, as indispensably anterior to its enjoyment. Sanctification, itself a part of the free salvation, is conditional of the full salvation. Faith, itself a grace, is the prerequisite to ulterior grace. So, perseverance is both a secured privilege and a commanded duty. "Therefore," says the Apostle, "stand fast," not the less that he says elsewhere, "he who stablisheth us with you, and hath anointed us is God, who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." (2 Cor. i. 21.)

And in order to this standing fast, see how he again commends the word of truth, ever honoured as the means of spiritual life and growth in grace. What is of the Spirit effectually is, our Saviour himself tells us, of the word of God instrumentally: —"sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." And the Apostle, like his Master, tells Christians that they are clean

through the word as really as through the blood of Christ: (Eph. v. 25, 26.) Christ "loved the Church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

"Hold the traditions."—I need scarcely explain that there are no other traditions recognized by Paul than the oral or written words of inspired men: what was afterwards written was yet partly oral. He explains himself—"whether by word or our epistle." The canon being not yet complete in that day, he naturally charges it on these Thessalonians, who had enjoyed his personal ministrations, to have his doctrines in remembrance. The quarrel of Protestants is not with the word "tradition," which signifies what has been delivered to the Church, and committed to it as a sacred deposit to be guarded and handed down from one generation to another. All Scripture is a "tradition" in this good sense. It is unauthorised traditions and uncertain, which we decline, such as have too often been substituted for the word of the living God. And the very command to hold fast the Apostolic tradition, oral once, now written, and well authenticated, is what renders imperative the avoiding the mere commandments of men.

Finally,—the prayer of this passage—how much is it in keeping with the doctrine and with the precept foregoing! The matter of the prayer; how much in few words! the manner, how assured, and how assuring! The Apostle insinuates the ample grounds for expecting the blessings prayed for, in his introduction, or description of the source whence he invokes them. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ, and God the Father." He lingers again on the precious names of the Saviour, in this instance mentioned even before the Father, as if to remind us that he is no less than the Father, and with the Spirit, the fountain of grace, as well as especially, and so most frequently represented, the channel through which it flows:—"our Lord,"—divine Master; "Jesus," Saviour; "Christ," anointed; no vain tautology, since each name is suggestive of grounds of encouragement in prayer. But just as the Master himself teaches his disciples also to comfort themselves with this, "the Father himself loveth you," (John xvi. 27) so does the Apostle add, "and God, even our Father, who hath

loved us." And both from what he is, and from what he hath done, he draws the cheering inference as to what he will do: "may he comfort your hearts!" His is the power to reach the heart; no other can soothe it effectually: "and stablish you in every good word and work." Behold here the far-reaching morality of the Gospel! See the help provided for every faithful and obedient disciple! Thus, as the Apostle does not the less enjoin the duty of standing fast, that he has just told them of the securities of the covenant; so, not the less does he plead for stablishing grace, that such grace is promised. The promises are our warrant to plead; and the Spirit of adoption teaches Christians to guide themselves by all God's revealed will. Enough for them to know that he will be inquired of for these things to do them for them. They use without gainsaying the appointed instrumentality; and the blessing comes only sweetened the more, that what was rendered sure by love is seen to be accomplished in faithfulness:—the gift at once of preventing grace, and the fulfilment of prayer!

PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT.

The exposition has nearly anticipated our practical remarks. Yet we would invite attention to certain great lessons to be derived from the passage as a whole.

1. It is very significant how often Paul exemplifies the duty of thanksgiving for distinguishing grace. It is not in the spirit of vain boasting that any one should contemplate the grace that has made him to differ. But neither is it a small matter for congratulation, if mercy hath chosen us. There are some who would take away the praise of virtue by referring to the various lots of individuals, and by supposing what might have been the event had our circumstances and disadvantages been the same as those of others. They think they assign a sufficient reason not only for sympathy with the ignorant or the errorist, but for holding the chances of acceptance with God equal as between men of sound creed and unsound, when they can say: "Had you been born where these were, and trained as they were, you might have thought as they do, and feel as they do. Why value yourselves on a distinction of privilege which as to you has been so ac-

cidental?" We would, they would say "providential," and then the taunt is already half answered. For it is all very well to rebuke the spirit of boasting; the Scripture itself rebukes it, and says, Who maketh thee to differ? But does it follow that the goodness of Providence is not to be devoutly acknowledged? Does it make truth the less valuable that the mind that has been privileged to see it, must own a divine illumination? And if by human instrumentalities provided to us without our foresight, and by favourable influences brought to bear on us while yet unconscious of them, our minds were induced to choose the good and avoid the evil, are we less to appreciate the favour of Providence that led us thus in the right way and preserved us from the paths of the destroyer? The fact, if admitted, that under other circumstances we might have been what others are, is no argument that all circumstances are indifferent, or all creeds alike safe. The apostle does not speak thus. He distinguishes between the truth that saves, and the lie that is damning. He connects the hope of salvation with the belief and love of the truth, and he gives thanks on behalf of those—surely teaching them to be thankful themselves—whom God had chosen, and who by the gospel had been called. Only be sure that you have been brought to know the truth spiritually, and that you are able to give a reason for your faith and your hope; then care not for the taunt, you believe just as your fathers and others believed. None the worse surely for your faith, if these loved it before you; and only an additional reason for thanksgiving to God's preventing goodness, who, purposing your salvation, anticipated your own choice and counsel; and so early familiarized you with the lessons of wisdom that your decision at length for God and for truth seemed easy, and your very prejudices have seemed to be on virtue's side. But it is well, howsoever you derived your convictions, when you can say like the people of Samaria, to her who first guided them to Christ: "Now we believe, not because of your word, but we have heard him ourselves." So, however, led by parents, or led by pastors, bless God if you have heard and proved the word to your own content. And to him who would say: "Had you been born among Mahometans, you would have been a Mahometan; had you been trained a Ro-

manist, you might have lived and died a Romanist;" let it be your reply: "Possibly so it might have been; but it is not less cause for my humble gratitude to Him who makes me to differ, that the Bible and not the Koran came into contact with my mind, and that I was trained to know the true traditions of the inspired word of life, and to turn a deaf ear to those inventions of men which might have corrupted my heart, and perilled my soul." Do men less value civilization because it may be true that, if born in other times or in other circumstances, they might have been contented with what now they would esteem as barbarism? Is liberty the less prized, or is the distinction between freedom and bondage less real, because the degraded vassal of tyranny loves his chains, or in other circumstances might have been as free as we are? Our thanksgiving for distinguishing grace is to include the circumstances of our lot, the means, the appliances, the providential arrangements by which the result on which we congratulate ourselves was brought about. Paul blesses God for electing love! We can do this without despising others, and without extolling ourselves.

2. We see how eternal election, so alarming to many, may be viewed as a doctrine fraught with comfort. Only know your election; what is this but to know that God loves you, that his covenant is established with you? What a repose to the soul, and what a stimulus to spiritual action, that every gain made in the spiritual life is the development of an eternal purpose of grace! That every step taken in the spiritual journey is a nearer approach to a blessed consummation infallibly secured! Only let our election be once made sure by our calling; and let our calling be proved by the appropriate tests. And hence,

3. We may observe how different a thing election is, in its connection with life and practice, from what by many it is supposed to be. In is no less an election to holiness than to glory. We cannot know that God hath chosen us or others, apart from the consciousness or perception of the fruits of faith, and progress in sanctification. What a motive here to holy diligence! what an answer to every plea of indolence, or false security, as if once elected and knowing ourselves the elect, we may con-

clude to live as we list! On the contrary, the value of holy deeds is enhanced by this, that they are proofs indispensable of a title to heaven. Nor, surely, are christians less likely to love God,—and love is the fulfilling of the law,—when they have once attained to the knowledge that God has first loved them. Surely the certainty, as well as the greatness, of the provisions divine love is seen to have made for our safety and happiness, must operate by a sufficiently natural and intelligible law to induce a grateful ingenuous obedience.

And we see that the passage just expounded proceeds on this. "*Therefore,*" says the Apostle "stand fast," just as elsewhere he makes this practical appeal to the hearts of Christians. (Col. 3. 12.) "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

4. In its aspect on the inquirer as well as on the man already leading the Christian life, the decree of love has really nothing to discourage. Election is not God's taking one and refusing another of those who seek, and seek perhaps with like earnestness. So some picture the matter, and others wantonly misrepresent it. Election is the *cause* of any one seeking—it hinders none who seek from finding. So that, as we cannot know our election but by our calling, the very first or incipient desire Godwards and heavenwards is a symptom of the divine favour for us. The decree bars the access of none who would come, nor does the condemnation of any sinner rest on non-election. The invitation is indefinite to all. Instead of being discouraged because God has not alike loved and chosen all, oh, let it encourage and excite us, that God has loved any of our race whatever, yea, many! and that sure as the connection established between God's plans and their accomplishment, is the connection between faith and salvation, between holiness and heaven, between seeking in earnest and finding! The very sovereignty connected with the freeness of God's choice is calculated to inspire hope into the breast even of the chief of sinners. For, since it is not foreseen faith or holiness that determines the divine decree, or is acknowledged as

the cause of the divine choice: seeing that out of a condemned world God saves whom he will, and his decree of salvation is a decree to save by sanctifying; the unsanctified may venture to hope—the most unsanctified need not despair. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious," silences every claim of comparative merit; but it should equally prevent every feeling of despair. Jehovah *may* will your salvation, oh sinner, and who shall let it? Nay, take not merely hope, but certainty, from his promise, if only you lay hold on it believingly, penitently. The husbandman may sow and never reap; yet on the general probability of gathering he goes forth, bearing the precious seed. Had you no more ground of hope than he, the part of wisdom would be to seek, to try—to knock at the door of mercy. But you have greater ground of confidence than this, "they that sow to the Spirit" ever reap; "they that seek shall find." "All that the Father hath given to me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out."

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