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ELECTION AND LORDSHIP

There is a special subject I want to speak about, but I will begin with this vexed question of Election, for there are many people here, I dare say, who are distressed and troubled about it. I would like to say this, that if the doctrine of Election is the ground of your confidence before God, I would very tenderly and earnestly ask you to reconsider your whole position. God never intended that His people should be saved by a doctrine, or, to make a stronger statement still, that they should be saved by a fact. We have a Saviour. God is our Saviour; and the great truth of Election does not speak to us about a fact relating to ourselves; it is a revelation of the character of God. It speaks to us of His love, which, like everything else connected with Himself, is timeless; and if you ask what particular date is to be attached to it, you do not understand what you are talking about - it is before all time, before the foundation of the world. It speaks to us also of the unchangeableness of His purpose. And if you search the Scripture upon this subject (and there is no book to open up the Scriptures like the Bible itself) you will find by the use of the word in the passages where it occurs, that for the people of God Election has to do with privilege and dignity - this is the characteristic thought in it.

Who is the Elect of God? The Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Jew, in many respects, knows his Bible better than we do, and their taunt at the cross was "Let Him save Himself if He be the Christ, the Elect of God" (Luke 23:35). A title, I say, of dignity and affection. You and I, if we are indeed in Him, are in the elect, and we, too, are the Elect of God. So we read: "As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on," etc. That does not mean that we are people who, for some inscrutable reason, are separated off from other people, and put into a position which makes us independent of the grace of God, independent of His mercy to us in Christ. If you have that thought of Election get rid of it. We are as much dependent upon God our Saviour, dependent for our life here upon earth, and for the eternity that is before us, as if there was not a word about election in the Bible. Is it possible that there is a Christian here who shrinks back from the statement of this truth, and would like to have something, as it were, paid over the counter that would make us independent of our Saviour God? Banish the thought, and learn to have truer and worthier thoughts about Him and His salvation.

Two other thoughts before I pass away from this. First of all, the truth of Election is wholly distinct from any thought of reprobation. God never elects people to damnation. That is a corollary upon what I said before; and if time permitted I might turn to Scripture after Scripture to enforce the truth of it. And, secondly, I want very definitely to press - and it is very helpful to those who are seeking to bring the Gospel before others - that this truth of Election in no way affects the question as to the persons and the classes to whom the Gospel is addressed. You know the kind of theology which we generally connect with the term Calvinism, and which would teach us that the work of Christ has relation only to a certain definitely limited number of people in the world, and that all the rest are beyond the reach of grace. Well, if what I have said just now be true, this is utterly false. You point to an unconverted man passing down the road, and ask me "Is that man elect?" I answer "Most certainly not"; if he is not in Christ he has no right whatever to a title of dignity and privilege that belongs primarily to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and to us only as in Him. But that does not touch this question. So far as the death of Christ is concerned, its relation to that man is expressed by the words of the Gospel message. Are they true words? I don't mean can we so state them that no one will detect that they are not true? The Gospel has not got a pulpit side, and another side turned to the people. No! it is like God Himself, absolutely and unreservedly true. "God so loved the world, that

He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Who gave Himself a ransom for all, the testimony to be borne in its own times." I will read you a few words which, though only from a man, are of very much higher authority than any Calvinist dare to pretend to. "Though Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and is offered through God's benignity indiscriminately to all, yet all do not receive Him." Whose words do you think these are? They are the words of Calvin himself, in his commentary upon Romans 5, and the editor of the English edition of his works, adds these notable words: "It appears from this sentence that Calvin held general redemption."

These words I have verified myself. I came the other day upon another quotation from Calvin in the writings of Bishop Ryle, of Liverpool, and I give them on his authority. On John 3, he says, "Christ employed the universal term whosoever both to invite indiscriminately all to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is the import of the term world. Though there is nothing in the world that is worthy of God's favour, yet He shows Himself to be reconciled to the whole world when He invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ."

Now this leads me to say - and I am sure I carry with me here the sympathy and conviction of every Christian - that every question about salvation is falsely stated, and every thought about salvation is wrong in some way unless it connects itself with God as the centre. If you have been trying to work out your personal salvation, or to get proof of it apart from God, you have begun at the wrong end, and you will never find settled peace. I know we are very proud of ourselves, for it is quite characteristic of this end of the nineteenth century talk to suppose that we are wonderful creatures. But in His presence we are just like insects creeping upon the ground; we are very contemptible creatures indeed. The angels who never sinned are more wonderful creatures than we are, aye, and the angels that sinned too. But God has set His love upon us. He so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us, and now God Himself has become our Saviour. In the words of the old prophet, "The Lord Jehovah has become our salvation." What a magnificent truth this is. If the Lord Jehovah has become my salvation, then my salvation is become a part of the very ground plan of the universe of God; and it calls forth the word, 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?' It is not intended that the elect should start up and exclaim, "What wonderful people we are, to be sure!" Our thoughts should be of God, His power, His faithfulness, His mercy, His grace and His love. And we are in God's hands now; who then shall lay anything to our charge? We have seen something like this in the history of our own country in the last few years. What are a handful of soldiers to this nation? A general who knows his business is willing to sacrifice whole regiments for the sake of gaining a victory; but if you have a handful of Englishmen shut up in Chitral the whole power of England is pledged to bring deliverance to them; and I venture to say that this country would sacrifice thousands of men and millions of money to accomplish this, once it declared it would deliver them. And you, who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, have to do with God's purposes as revealed in Him, and when you get hold of this and know that He has linked you with His own glory, you cease to rack your brains about your Election; you learn to think about the throne of God and its steadfastness, about the Blood of Christ and its preciousness, about the Word of God that endureth for ever; and there you have a confidence and peace that nothing can shake, either in this world or in the world that is to come.

This leads me to another thought. One great reason of the confusion which exists in the minds of Christians about all kinds of things is because they know little or nothing about Christianity. I am using the word in a special sense. This is called a Christian country, just as we talk of China as a heathen country. But - though you have no right to deny that use of the word, for it is quite legitimate - it is not its only meaning. In a deeper sense of the word the Christian is one who is in Christ, and in this sense no one has a right to call himself a Christian who has not eternal life in Christ. But there is yet another meaning of the word. No one, albeit he is in Christ, and has eternal life, has any right whatever to be acknowledged as a Christian before men unless he is living a Christ life upon earth. To live as a man of the world, and yet hold yourself out to be a Christian - this is shameful and wrong. If you will live a worldly life, keep your Christianity to yourself, and don't stumble other people, both Christians and the unconverted around you, by claiming to be a Christian. In the

meanness of your spirit thank God in secret that He has saved your miserable soul, but don't retard His work in the world by telling others you are a Christian.

But even this does not exhaust the meaning of the word Christian. There is another most important thought connected with it which is too much ignored. If you ask whether a man is a lawyer, you may mean merely whether he is by profession barrister or solicitor, or the object of your inquiry may be to ascertain whether he is really versed in the knowledge of the law. Now, do you see my last thought about the meaning of the word Christian? It is one who is versed in the doctrine of Christianity. How very little there is of it! The Lord Jesus Christ has come. He is the centre of all truth; and He has called us to stand with Himself in the midst of all the truth that has been revealed to us in the Word, not only for the present, but as regards the past and the future, so that in the full intelligence of all this we should live out our life here for Him. And this is what it means to be a Christian.

Some people are very indignant when you speak about dispensational truth, but you will never know anything about Christianity until you understand dispensational truth. Years ago, in a country town where I was holding some meetings, a gentleman came to help me. He had only recently been converted, and a friend had been trying to teach him dispensational truth, but it only made him angry. "So you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that this verse and that verse is not for me?" And so on. Our discussion continued till we set out for the meeting. At the meeting he took up Luke 14, and read about the great man who made a great supper, and bade many. He talked about the invitation, which he told the hearers was for them, and pressed them to accept it. So he went on preaching what he considered a clear Gospel. He next described the servants going out to the highways and hedges, and bringing in the poor, maimed, halt, and blind, and then he came to the words, "For none of these men that were bidden shall taste of my supper." As he turned round and looked at me, he stumbled, halted, and hesitated, and abruptly sat down. I got up and gave out a hymn, and while we were singing it he disappeared. When the meeting was over I went home and found him doubled up on the sofa sobbing like a child. "I see it all now," said he, "I have been setting myself against the truth of God. God did that which is described in the parable, He made a great supper and invited His friends, but now the word has gone forth - 'not one of those men that were bidden shall taste of My supper.'"

Now, I do not want to offend you, but that, is where you have come in - the poor, maimed, halt, blind - the dregs of the streets: that is what we are before God, and He has brought us into the banquet that His friends refused. We are now God's elect, and have this wonderful place of privilege and blessing, and are united immediately in the closest relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

I met a friend of mine the other day, one of those enthusiastic people I am half afraid of, because they try to force me beyond my pace, and it is not always safe to allow people to force you beyond your pace; and he took hold of me and almost gave me a shake, as he said, "I hope you are looking for the King." "No," I said, "I am not looking for the King." "What?" he said, "Don't you believe in the coming of the Lord?" "Of course I do! I am looking for the Lord from heaven, but I am not looking for the King." He is King and Priest too, but it is not in that character He is coming. The great characteristic truth of the present dispensation is Lordship - the Lordship of Christ.

I was asked the other night, by Mr. Andrew Murray, what special truth was wanted at the present time on account of the state of the Church? I have thought of it a good deal since, and I would say that it is the truth, so utterly neglected, of the Lordship of Christ. You ask, "Is it not obedience?" That is only a sequence, a corollary upon the other. Let us get hold of this, that He is LORD, and then will come in obedience. It is the great purpose which God has in view in all that He is working out. He has given Him the name that is above every name, not only in this world, but in that which is to come. And I give my judgment humbly, but confidently, that there is only one name which is above every name in this world, or the world which is to come - the great, incommunicable name of Jehovah; but He has given Him that name that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow - a name that speaks of humiliation, oh, how deep! We forget its significance. It was a common name among the Jews, more common than Samuel, or Daniel; yet in that name every knee shall bow, of knees in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. It is for this that the great purpose of the ages is slowly working out.

Think of this, any of you here that are troubled about those questions that have been alluded to as to the condition of the lost; get rid of your theology upon that subject, and get hold of the truth that there will not be a creature in the universe but will bow before Him and own Him Lord.

What, then, is the Christian position, and what is the Christian life? Is it to anticipate the realization of the prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven"? Is it our thought that, so far as it rests with us, His will should be done on earth as it is done in heaven? We talk about the future when all shall show it. But do our lives show it now? It is possible to take up the most blessed truths which we receive from this Word, or hear from the lips of others, and yet to make them our own opinions, and so degrade them till they become our own fads, instead of so receiving them that they shall bring us to His feet in the acknowledgment of His Lordship, and create in us deeper and more earnest longings to be in the true place of service.

Christianity is not based upon the teaching of Christ while on earth; we have heard Him who speaks from Heaven, and this is the special revelation of Christianity. Do not mistake me; it is not that any portion of this book is to be disregarded, for everything that belongs to Him belongs to us and what is there that does not belong to Him? What is there that does not concern His glory? But when I speak of the special revelation of Christianity, I mean the revelation that dates, not from the cross, much less from His life on earth before the cross, not even from His resurrection as He talked and walked with His disciples in His body of glory, but from His place in Ascension at the right hand of God. The voice that speaks to us speaks from heaven. And if we are Christians, we are looking for the Lord from heaven.

In closing I want to ask you, as you talk about the Coming, do you realize the meaning of the word? Am I wrong in thinking that when you speak of the Coming you are thinking mainly, if not exclusively, of an event to be fulfilled in the future? But the word parousia means literally His "Presence." It speaks of His being with us. If it be in relation to earth, it speaks of His being here. It is only in a secondary sense that it means the actual fact of His arrival, and yet we take that as though it were the exclusive meaning of the word. And if we get hold of this thought that it is not a strange thing that the Lord should be present with His people, I think it will revolutionize the ideas which some of us have upon this whole subject. It is the strangest thing in the world that He should be absent. If a man has to go abroad - it may be as a servant of his country, or as a bread-winner - in such circumstances that he cannot have his wife and children with him, are they not always longing to be together again? And when you talk about his coming back, people do not exclaim, "What an extraordinary idea!" He longs to come back simply because his loved ones are here. Everybody understands this, for the children of this world are wiser than the children of light. So also, if the Lord Jesus has gone away He is certainly coming back again. And yet they tell me that in America, in certain circles, a man's head is thought affected if he talks about the Lord's coming, as though it were some extraordinary craze he had taken hold of. Oh, have you ever known what it is, in all this talk about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, to have felt a want, so that the words, "Come, Lord Jesus," are no mere cuckoo cry, but the expression of a deep longing, caused by a real sense of His absence - a want of Himself?

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