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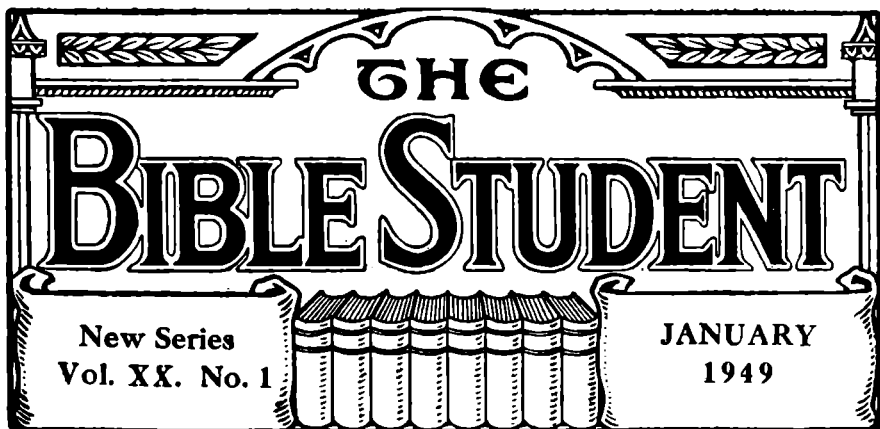
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*"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"*

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*Editor:* A. McDONALD REDWOOD

their lives for higher things than these. *Never was the challenge more urgent, never the call more arresting, the crisis more imminent than in this day and this hour in which we live. Yet, how humbling and challenging to see large areas waiting for the pilgrim feet of the Gospel pioneer!*

## DIVINE ELECTION

BY ARTHUR T. PIERSON, D.D.\*

One subject we cannot avoid though it is very difficult, perplexing, and mysterious—the subject of Election. “For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” “According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world. . . . Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children” (Eph. 1:4, 5).

No doubt Election is taught in Scripture. Three words are used in Ephesians—“chosen,” “predestinated,” “before-ordained.” Chosen refers to the eternal past; Predestination to the eternal future, looking to the final destiny; Fore-ordination links these together, and shows the co-ordination of God’s will and man’s will in the actual process of Redemption. God’s plan for my life, and the life as actually lived, exactly match each other (chap. 2:10). The danger is of perverting Election into Fatalism, which destroys the freedom of man’s choice,—and, with that, man’s accountability and responsibility. We should deal carefully with anything taught in the Word of God, accepting the mystery where it is inexplicable. “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God.” It would be remarkable if, in this Book, there were no thoughts above our own.

\* The writings of the late Dr. A. T. Pierson were well known a generation ago, and exerted a powerful and world-wide ministry. It is now thirty-eight years since that great man of God and eloquent Preacher went to his rest, but there must be many still alive who were led into a completely changed spiritual life through his written and spoken word. Not only was he a great expositor but he had a wonderful gift of evangelism, and the writer of this note can bear personal testimony to his remarkable power both upon those who listened and read. Dr. Pierson’s reading of the New Testament further led him to become an outstanding advocate of Foreign Missions, and his books on that subject alone sent many a devoted life to the Field, there to ‘spend and be spent’ in the service of the Lord of the Harvest.

This doctrine of Election is rather for the believer than for the unbeliever, and what was a stumbling-stone to the latter often becomes a stepping-stone to the former. Election, taught in the Word, must be consistent both with the sovereign will of God and the freedom of man; and if we cannot reconcile these two, it is because the subject is so infinitely lifted up above us.

Man is free. There are in your heart and mine seven thunders that utter their voices such as "I am," "I think," "I reason," "I love," "I judge," "I choose," "I act." And all these voices unite in affirming "I am responsible." Moreover, God Himself directly appeals to choice: He says, "Why will ye die?" (Ezek. 18:31). As the Apocalypse closes, we read: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Thus the last great invitation in God's Book is an appeal to the will. But—most startling of all—in Christ's lament over Jerusalem: "How often would I have gathered thy children even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." The yearning of God and the stubborn refusal of man are here put in clear antagonism.

Often, in the same Scripture, both sides are presented. In John 3:1-10, it would seem that man has nothing to do but wait for regeneration. But, in the latter half of that chapter, just as much emphasis is laid on the will of man as previously on the sovereign act of God. Luke 15 contains one Parable in three parts: The first represents the Shepherd seeking the lost sheep "until He find it"—and then He carries it back. Again, the woman searches till she finds her lost piece of silver, which does nothing but lie there till found and restored to its place on her necklace.

Thus far one might judge that all man has to do is passively to wait for God to come after him. But in the latter part of the parable we have the complementary truth, and from this part, if *alone*, it might be inferred that the sinner has everything to do, and God nothing; but, putting the two together, we get the whole truth. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God, which worketh in you, both to will and to do." So far from God's working being a reason for not working, it is the very opposite. We are to work out, because God works in.

The experience of saints vindicates the doctrine of Election. Saul of Tarsus came to a knowledge of God only when met in the way by the risen Lord Jesus when driving forward in a mad career of persecution: what wonder he exalts electing grace, for where would he have been but for that grace! Tens of thousands

of sinners evidently come to a knowledge of God only by the sovereign grace that seeks them out, and saves them. Most remarkable, in the history of missions, is the way in which God manifests His electing grace, in choosing, equipping, and sending forth chosen workers.

As to the practical aspects of Election, a distinguished preacher has appropriately said, that from a practical point of view "the elect are 'whosoever will', and the non-elect are 'whosoever won't'." Dr. Hodge used to say to his students: "All of us Calvinists when we preach, preach like Arminians, for we urge men to choose Christ but when even Arminians pray, they pray like Calvinists, for they dwell on the wonders of the grace that bought and sought them."

The truths of Redemption reach their climax in the lofty summits of Justification and Predestination. We imagine many a believer in perplexity over them, and appreciate such perplexities, having been harassed by them ourselves. Such doctrines being among the high things of God, it is equally hard to bring them down to the level of men, or to bring men up to their level. They remind us of the Domes of the Yosemite: If a few daring adventurers scale their precipitous sides, most of us can only look up, with awe, at their sublime loftiness. Yet there may be a practical side, from which these grand doctrines are seen to be corresponding halves of one greater original truth, as those Domes themselves appear to have been once united, but cleft asunder.

In order to help make these mysterious teachings both apprehensible and useful, we venture to take these truths as *doctrines* which may be put in *simpler* forms. Examples of the two main forms of difficulty which face us in Bible study are, first, what is *hard for the mind to grasp*; and secondly, what is hard for *the natural heart to receive*. Of the first, Justification is an example; of the second, Predestination. To understand our acceptance with God on the basis of an imputed righteousness is not easy, because of the narrow limits of the *mind*; but how to *reconcile* God's electing decrees with human freedom of choice and action, is a question which challenges not only the feebleness of our understanding, but the pride and perverseness of our *heart*. How, then, shall we evade the difficulty without avoiding the doctrines?

*First*, we may use *simpler forms of words*. "Justification" and "Predestination" may do for Church Catechisms and theological treatises; but, for the average believer, the more familiar household

words are needed, that they may not at the start stumble over technical terms. In the *Gospels*, in the discourses of our Saviour, we look in vain for such words as Justification, Sanctification, Predestination, Election. They are reserved for the Epistles, because the words of Jesus were meant to be our model for teaching children; for feeding babes that, having no teeth to chew with, need the pure *milk* of the Word, that does not demand mastication; while the Epistles were for maturer believers, who have their cutters and grinders, and have both need of, and power to digest, strong meat.

Second, we may also *substitute things for names*. In the Gospels are found all the truths found in the Epistles; but in the *germ* only. Christ taught all these sublime doctrines, *not by names, but by things!* Instead of talking of 'justification through imputed righteousness', He told the Parable of the Prodigal Son, who renounced a father's love and care, went from home, spent all, wasting his substance in the worst sins, and came home with nothing left but rags and wretchedness. And yet, on *that* poor beggar, the father's love and grace put a *robe, shoes, and even a ring*. Any child can understand *that*; and yet here is imputed righteousness in the robe, the alacrity of holy obedience in the shoes, and the adoption of a son and heir in the ring! (Compare the Parable of the Wedding Garment.) So, while Jesus never spoke of 'election' or 'predestination,' He gives us the Parable of the *Sheepfold*, of which He is the *Door*, and of the *flock*, of which He is the *Shepherd*; and, because either of these does not put the whole truth before us, He gives us the *two* half-truths joined in one double parable (John 10). How exquisitely does the doctrine of electing grace wind about the mind and heart, all unconsciously, as we study this double parable! How do I get to heaven? Not through any door I make for myself; not by climbing into it over the wall by my good works, but through *Him, the Door*. All I have to do is to go in through *an open way made for me*. If that is not Election, what is? But this needs to be put more fully and forcefully. And so Jesus gives us a supplementary or complementary parable. "I am the good Shepherd." Then He expands the thought: As the good Shepherd, He gives His life for the sheep. He goes before them, calls them by name, leads them out and in; and so their safety is owing to His power and love and all their movements are only because of His voice, which they follow! Here is predestination, vicarious sacrifice, prevenient

grace, effectual calling, and holy obedience, and all traced back to one source—the Redeemer's love for us, which first awakened and constantly nourishes our love for Him!

This is teaching not by *names*, but by *things*, a method always most successful with children. Here lies the power of object lessons, visible forms of illustration. We make a double impression by sight and by sound. Instead of taxing immature intellectual faculties by abstruse mysteries, we do not even make any heavy draught on the imagination. So familiar, so vivid is the form of presentation that it becomes almost visible. So it was that our Lord, teaching not by names but by things, "revealed these things even unto babes!"

The substance of these grand truths must be got hold of by every believer before he can give them in simple, practical form to others. Let him, like the cattle which chew the cud in order to give milk, master the doctrine, that he may know how to present the thing without the name.

*Justification* means "making just." It is a legal term, and refers to man's position before the law of God. He is not only a sinner, and so under condemnation; but has a sinful nature, which prompts him continually to new acts of sin, so that the more law he has the more light he has, and so the greater sin. As every man has sinned and come short of duty, the law has its grip upon him; and even if he could henceforth perfectly obey, there is need of something to bridge over his *past* sin. On any ground, therefore, there must be an atonement. If he comes before the law at all, without bearing its curse, some one else must bear his guilt, and he himself must bear before the law a merit not his own. He is bankrupt; another must pay his debt. He is naked; another must clothe him. He is a felon; another must be his surety. This is Justification—standing before God with my debt paid, my nakedness clothed, and my guilt borne by another. Man's gospel is, "Do!" God's Gospel is, "Done!" Boasting is excluded. I have only to believe; this is my only work, the work of faith, which is my bond of union with the Justifier—to take Jesus as Saviour, to put on Christ, to accept the white robe of His perfect righteousness, which is "unto all and upon all that believe."

*Election* is practically this: My salvation is due, first of all, to God's choice of me, not to my choice of God. I do, indeed, choose Him, but because He first chose me. My love, my coming to Him, my yearning toward Him, are all to be traced to His love. His coming to me, His yearning toward me. Otherwise,

salvation would hang on man and not on God, and would imply a merit on man's part that would dispute the claims of grace.

The consistent view presented in the Word of God, throughout, is this: God has a *plan*, born in His own heart, borne out by His own providence and grace. And in our salvation, all from first to last is to be *traced to Him*. This plan is perfect and all-embracing. It takes in my repentance, faith, justification, sanctification, glorification. He begins the work *without* my knowledge and co-operation; He carries it on *with* my knowledge and co-operation. I come to see His plan, to recognise its perfect beauty and benevolence; I, by faith, come into that plan, as a planet wheels into its predestined orbit; and begin in holy obedience to revolve about God, held in my place by the centripetal force of His grace and love. That alone could prevent the centrifugal force of my old sinful nature from making me again a wandering star.

When once brought within that plan by my own consent all things work together for my good. There can be no confusion or collision with any other interest, for every other being has his orbit also, and it cannot cross mine. Even 'eccentric orbits' only appear so, because the universal plan is not, from our limited point of view, clearly apprehended by us. Every part of the work done in me is linked to every other, and all are but parts of a work done for me by my Redeemer. As Leighton says: "Effectual calling is inseparably tied to this eternal foreknowledge or election on the one side, and to salvation on the other; these two links of the chain are up in heaven, in God's own hand; but this middle one is let down to earth into the hearts of His children, and they, laying hold of it, have sure hold on the other two, for no power can sever them."

Both predestination and justification are thus the *two branches* from one grand stock—God's eternal plan of grace. In the work of our salvation, the first thought and the whole plan were His; His the first drawing, the first approach, the first calling; His the first loving, yearning, seeking: before I was even the *subject*, I was the *object* of divine grace. And before God made these first advances to me, He meant to; and as there was no new thought or intent in the unchangeable God, that previous purpose was an *eternal* one. So that, to admit, as all true disciples do, that justification is all of grace, and that God, in the whole work of saving souls, makes *the first approach*, is to be compelled logically to admit that from all eternity He purposed such gracious and unmerited advances to the sinner—*which is Election!*