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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE V.

ELECTION AND FOREORDINATION.

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THESE topics, and the difficulties connected with them, can never be entirely eliminated from human speculation. Some of the difficulties, in certain respects, may indeed be greatly alleviated. Such alleviation, for instance, may come in the spirit and temper in which the subject is approached and dealt with,—in which conclusions reached, are held and asserted. Similar relief may follow the clear and distinct recognition, and confession, of the real difficulties of the case, intellectually and morally,—the necessity, therefore, of great moderation as to one's own conclusions, of great forbearance as to those of others. So, again, such alleviation may come in the distinct cognizance of what is the central difficulty, where is really the pinch, speculatively or practically, to the full comprehension of the issues involved. And, last of all, there may be relief, or disentanglement, in the limitation of the inquiry to some specific sphere of investigation. There is, we will say, a philosophical election and predestination. There is a Scripture doctrine of the same subject. And, then again, there may be theological systems, usually attempted combinations of Scripture and philosophy. The distinct limitation of the discussion to one of these fields, and the keeping it there, will remove at least some of the entanglements with which it has been connected.

As to the first two of these alleviating influences, we may well rejoice that we have come into the inheritance of them. The bitterness and intolerance with which these

questions were discussed, at earlier periods, in the days of Augustine and Gottschalk or even of those of the Reformation, by men who a few days after died together, at the stake, as martyrs for Christ; the ferocity which drove such men as Grotius and Episcopus into exile; the harshness of spirit and of language, in its discussion, by such men as Wesley and Toplady,—these are now recognized, almost universally, as entirely out of place. Earnestness is not necessarily bitterness or ferociousness. Nor is it likely that these questions will ever again be discussed in that manner. Whatever the system held or the position defended, its manifested and unavoidable difficulties will enforce moderation.

It will additionally help us, moreover, to keep in view the two other alleviating agencies already alluded to, in any such investigation: 1st. Upon what field shall it be investigated? 2d. Shall we confine it to that field?

It is a question of philosophy. How, in the domain of philosophy, is it to be investigated? It is a doctrine of Scripture. What does Scripture say in regard to it? Where, with the former, is the central difficulty? Where is it, with the latter? Are they diverse or identical?

First, then, we direct and confine our examination to the domain of Scripture. Such a Scripture doctrine there is undoubtedly. What is it? Is it collective or individual? Is it simply to blessing and its opposite, or is it also to character? Is it conditional or unconditional? If a combination of these, say of blessing and of character, of the conditional and the unconditional, how far?

Confining our view, therefore, to the facts of scriptural teaching, both in the way of divine declaration and divine dealing, it is clear that there was a collective foreordination and election to certain divine favors and advantages, both temporal and spiritual, as to corresponding obligations. The former of these, the blessings and advantages, are incipiently

unconditional. Their full results are conditional, upon the manner in which the obligations of the election are honored or disregarded. These obligations, as the blessings preceding and following, with which they are in correlation, are all included in the election. Nor can they, in any anticipation of results, be properly separated. The selection, for instance, of the Jewish people; that, again, of one tribe from that people as the ruling tribe, from whom Messiah should come; of another, for the priesthood; of particular families, out of these two tribes, one for the Royal, and the other for the priestly honors; so again of the prophet class,—these clearly make manifest such principle in the Old Testament. So, in the New Testament, the rejection of Israel and the bringing in of the Gentiles; the selection, out of Jews and Gentiles, of a new community and collective organization, the visible church, to the blessings of the new dispensation,—this is no less clear, to the most cursory reader of the inspired record. However explained, the fact of collective election—sometimes of a family, of a tribe, of a nation, or of a church—meets us everywhere.

Nor can it be said, as it sometimes is, that this was merely to outward advantages. It was not only to these, but to all others. The elect member of any such community came to the full enjoyment of these two forms of blessing in a very different way; but his election included both. If they were not both actually secured and enjoyed, it was because they were not properly encountered. In other words, through individual delinquency, the election to obligation was separated from the election of blessing; and there was failure, therefore, as to the full benefits of either. The ideal election was not realized in the actual.

And thus we are able to see how such election was unconditional and at the same time conditional. It was unconditional, as to times, places, persons, actual circumstances, and the advantages and obligations therewith

connected, temporal and spiritual. It was conditional as to the mode in which the community or its individual components bore themselves with reference to the fact of such election and its moral accompaniments. In the wilderness, for example, the whole camp of Israel, in time, place, and actual arrangement, was the election. But, in point of fact, when Moses came down from the Mount, a large portion were in shameless apostasy and idolatry,—the loyal tribe of Levi retaining its allegiance. Ideally, it was the whole elect people of the twelve tribes; actually, only this one loyal tribe. So again, in the time of Elijah. Out of the ten tribes, there were only seven thousand—the actual election, out of the whole against the ideal—who had not bowed the knee to Baal, in open apostasy. So also in the election of the Gentiles, and the casting away of the Jews, as the one accepted and the other rejected the new dispensation. Side by side with the fact of unconditional, divine, and gracious arrangement, by which blessing came to the Gentiles collectively, and deprivation to the Jew, runs the conditional fact, as under the Old Testament dispensation, of the actual enjoyment of the full blessing of such election, and the actual suffering of such deprivation, depending upon the manner in which they were personally met and treated by the two classes. The individual Jew, in spite of the collective reprobation of his people, personally accepting the rejected Messiah of this people, came into the full blessing of Gentile election. So the individual Gentile, failing to secure and improve the benefits of his new election, relapsed into the rejection of Israel. The ideal election, collectively and individually, is identical. Both of these elements, the blessing and obligation, the unconditional divine bestowal and the conditional appropriation and enjoyment, are included. So too is it, ideally, with each one of the elect during his whole course. But, in the actual, we find these diversities; the elect some-

times making their election void, the non-elect coming in, and changing positions with them.

Nor is there any essential difference, if we circumscribe this election of Gentilism to the visible church of professed believers. The same elements of the unconditional as to the organic whole, and the conditional as to the individual; of the ideal and the actual, of the election of blessing and that of obligation, are no less here to be recognized. Whether that community existed, or whether a man was in it, was in the unconditional divine arrangement. Whether any such man was properly in that community, or ought to remain there, was conditional upon his personal character and action. Ideally, all that were of this elect body of Christ were Christ-like in spirit and life, making their calling and election sure. Actually, there were, in many cases, great inconsistencies and failures. How different, for instance, in the Epistles of Paul and Peter and John, the ideal church and the actual churches!

But is there not, it is sometimes asked, and additionally, an inner election within any such collection, an inner election of individuals, one to which, in the divine purpose, all the blessings are unconditionally secured and actually enjoyed? And reference is made to individual cases,—those of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of Jeremiah, of John the Baptist, and of Paul, as those of Esau and Pharaoh, of an opposite class. Three of these are referred to in the argument of the ninth chapter of Romans, as illustrations of the divine sovereignty; and the figure of the clay in the hand of the potter, used by the Apostle, is made use of to enforce the conclusion. Here, it has been said, we find everything unconditional,—the election and its full result,—with one blessing, with another doom. Would it not be better to say that the ordinary conditions and limitations, elsewhere clearly stated and insisted upon, are not here specifically mentioned, but are to be understood and implied? The

election of Jacob and the rejection of Esau before they were born, was independent of their personal action. It did not, however, supersede or exclude that action. Can we venture to say, that, in its final results, it was altogether irrespective of it?

All have to come to this, or something like it, with reference to one of these classes,—the reprobate. The potter does not make vessels merely for the purpose of breaking them; but when the clay fails to make a vessel of honor, it is made into a vessel of dishonor. Esau is finally rejected, not simply as Esau, but “as despising his birth-right.” Pharaoh was hardened, not simply as Pharaoh, but as Pharaoh resisting Jehovah. The result with this class, as entirely unconditional, and purely of divine origination, is so fearful, such an outrage to all rational and moral conviction, so in conflict with the general principles of Scripture and all scriptural delineations of the divine character, that, with but few exceptions, the conditional element of sin, with which God can have nothing to do as its originant, is brought in to justify the reprobation. The reprobate, it is urged, are so unconditionally, as to their final doom. But conditionally, they morally necessitate this doom by their own moral agency and their perverse exercise of it,—which, after all, only means that they condition it by their own conduct. Theologians have spoken of “elect infants.” But “reprobate infants,” although an implied class, have been left unnamed as well as undescribed; and reprobate adults whose sins did not reprobate them, would be quite as strange an anomaly. If, therefore, the conditional for this class, the elect for doom, why not with the other, the elect for blessing?

With both of these classes, moreover,—with the elect as with the reprobate,—it is to be noted, that, in all the individual cases mentioned, there is personal character corresponding, in the human subject of the divine election. If

Esau despises his birthright, and Pharaoh resists the divine will, Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob regard that will, and endeavor to obey it. The unconditional divine act which places each one of these, of both classes, in his peculiar position and circumstances, is responded to, in their own conduct, by their opposite course, and to opposite results. Obedience alike is demanded from both, and opportunity for it is afforded. Pharaoh is warned against death, as Abraham and Jacob are encouraged to the attainment of life; and, as they act under the circumstances, receiving the encouragement and warning, so is the result. After all, it is with these individual cases, as with the collective elections of Israel, or Gentilism, or the Christian church: the element of the conditional is side by side with the unconditional. The former is to the individual as he bears himself to his age and circumstances; the latter is as to his relation to these, and in matters entirely beyond his control and agency. For the former he is accountable, for the latter he is not. "Every man must bear his own burden." What that burden shall or must be, no man can decide. How it shall be borne, he must decide, and no one else can. Unconditional sovereignty imposes that burden. Conditioned human agency must decide, and does decide, how to bear it. And, if it be asked, How can we distinguish? What is our authority for passing from the unconditional to the conditional in the same connection, and in speaking of the same individuals? the reply is, The moral, as also the scriptural, necessities of the case. These not only justify, but demand, such transition. The sacred writers go upon the assumption, that their readers will bear in mind the facts of previous discussion, or the general principles of Scripture; and, when the subject demands, make the limitations which those principles necessitate. The discussion, for instance, of the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, assumes that the second chapter of that same Epistle is kept in mind.

Man, for instance, as to his personality, is always treated as free and accountable; and, therefore, as conditioning his own moral destiny. At the same time, in every moment, and in every movement, he is unconditionally at the divine disposal. When, in any particular case, these two things are spoken of together, in connection with the same individual, we recognize, under this general tenor of Scripture, where to find the conditional, where the unconditional. Distinguish the essential character of the facts, and they necessitate their own limitations.

Such, then, are the various forms and aspects of election, scripturally brought to our knowledge,—that of a family in its head or heads; of this family, or rather part of it, as it expanded to a nation; of a community, made up partly of this nation, and partly of others; and this latter, again, contemplated in its individual components. There are the elections of Abraham's family, through Isaac; of Israel, as a people; of Gentilism, in the universal offer of the gospel; of the visible church, as its outward result and manifestation. It was a great advantage and privilege to any man to be of this chosen family, of this holy nation, of this called and accepted church. Finding himself in such circumstances, he might properly recognize the divine and sovereign grace, the unconditional divine purpose, which had elected him to such position and circumstances and their corresponding advantages; and then make his calling and election sure.

But, within all these forms of election and during all the periods of their successive existence, there was another harmonious divine purpose and principle of elective blessing operating, which is no less clearly exhibited;—the clearly revealed divine purpose, running through all the dispensations, but only fully and clearly exhibited in the last, that spiritual election, election to full spiritual life and blessing, was only to faith, was always to faith; in any and in every case where the outward election encountered, and was responded to

by this inward principle, then the spiritual election, the election to grace and life, was accomplished. The Jew, the Apostle tells us, failed in this matter, and the Gentile succeeded; because the Jew did not, and the Gentile did, seek in faith. "It was of grace;" and it "was through faith, that it might thus be of grace." The ideal Christian church, as the ideal Israel, is sometimes contemplated and spoken of as actually and collectively, inwardly and individually, all that it ought to be. But, when it is dealt with, in its actualities, and with its existing materials and conditions of membership, these distinctions, involved in the election of faith, make their appearance. This final predestinative decree, this elective purpose of God, is to receive and save those who, by his grace and under the influence of his Spirit, in faith receive him; to reject those who resist that Spirit, and treat that grace with contempt and neglect. Nor is there any other or more ultimate divine purpose, revealed to us, to the accomplishment of the results thus indicated.

To this, two assertions have been added: first, the faith effectuating or appropriating the election, is not the free act of a free spirit, is an effect wrought upon, or into, the soul in a passive condition; or, if in any sense an act or response of the human spirit to the Spirit of God, it is the response of total inability to omnipotent irresistibility; secondly, it is, by this same irresistible agency, and to the final result, made indefectible. The divine decree or purpose is contemplated as having reference to the divine exercise, or not exercise, of this irresistible power. Such exercise, and also the eternal decree preceding, contemplate their objects purely as simple entities, characterless units, and, entirely without reference to action or character, makes its decision. Consequently the two classes are irreversibly decreed to their respective destinies; and that decree, purely in the divine acts and operation, is accomplished.

Manifestly, in these additions, there is the taking away,

the cutting up by the roots, of everything like human boasting, and self-dependence. But the trouble is, that the roots of human accountability are cut through and destroyed by the same process. The greatest moral and scriptural difficulty of which they are suggestive is, of course, in connection with the non-elect, the reprobate. There are difficulties, indeed, with the elect, in the adjustment of irresistible divine agency or purpose and real human agency. But these are comparatively manageable. Where all ends well, there will be little complaint as to the manner of reaching it. Under risk of shipwreck or storm, one gladly puts the helm in the hands of the experienced pilot. Men would gladly abdicate the prerogative of personal agency, for a sure and certain divine ordination and arrangement which brings eternal blessedness. The special press is with the idea of such divine ordination and arrangement purely with reference to hopeless wreck and misery. The divine will or the divine sovereignty, to which this result is sometimes ultimately referred, as solving all difficulties, it is to be remembered, is the will, the sovereignty, of wisdom, of justice, of goodness, and love, in the infinitude of the divine personal excellence, moral and spiritual. To refer such counsel and act to the will of such a Sovereign, only makes the difficulty more hopelessly insuperable.

But can these two assertions be sustained? Is the divine power, exerted upon man to the production of faith, irresistible? Is it not often noticed and spoken of in Scripture as resisted? Is not faith, even when such resistance has not taken place, when really in existence, liable to decay, to diminution, and even departure? In other words, are not the elect liable to become reprobates? and is not, to the reprobate, the way, and offer, open to the election? Is not the elect Gentile reminded that he stands by faith; that the reprobate Jew has been cast off by unbelief; and that, in the absence or loss, or in attainment or presence, of this faith,

they may again change positions? Why the earnest warning against the defect and loss of what was indefectible? Why the urgent appeals to repentance and faith, and through these to the blessing of salvation, that is, the election? The saved are the elect. The elect are the saved. These are told to "work out their own salvation," in their response to the divine aid and inducement; to "make their calling and election sure." At the same time they are warned against neglect and failure and hopeless apostasy. It is to be said, moreover, that if faith be, as described in this view, mere divine giving, with no corresponding human taking, the way in which it is usually described and insisted upon, and men are blamed for not exercising it, can only lead astray as to its character. On the other hand, as it is "a faith of the heart," that is, of the will,— "is a belief of the truth," and "comes by the word of God," we see that the view which has been spoken of is inadequate, in so far incorrect; that faith is a spiritual act, the response of the spirit of man to the influence and truth and convincing agency of the Spirit of God. The divinely revealed purpose, the predestinating decree, is to save men through this faith; that where such faith is, there is the election.

And thus it is we go back to that which is ultimate in this whole discussion,—the divine purpose and decree of election, the predestination of man, to certain results, in their final condition. While we recognize that in the purposes of eternal and immutable perfection the element of succession does not enter, yet it is only in some such order that we are able to speak or even think of them. The eternally divine purpose actually manifests itself and its result in successive movements; and taking these as our guide, we recognize in accomplishment the stages of this divine purpose of election. That purpose is first seen in the creation of man "in the image of God," in his capacity of dominion, as in his divinely conferred prerogative of dominion—

elect, of all earthly beings, to holiness and happiness:—to render this divine purpose and possibility an actuality, by the manner of his response to the obligations of his position. Thus situated, man failed. But God's purpose of blessing and of life did not fail. A new election, so to speak, of remedial salvation, for the race, is exhibited. So far as we know, and there are intimations in that direction, man is the only race of beings, the only world of transgressors, to whom such remedial election of salvation is vouchsafed. In Christ, the race is chosen, out of all other races, through faith, to salvation and holiness and happiness; thus rendering attainable the first divine purpose and object of original creation. And then, still further, to secure this result, to reveal this salvation, to make this divine purpose manifest, and to bring it within the reach and knowledge of all men, there were successive elective arrangements and dispensations: the elections of individuals, and families, and a nation, and a visible church, through which the manifested divine purpose of blessing might be savingly appropriated. The only obstacle to such result, as the blessing is revealed and offered, is the refusal and neglect to accept and secure it:—the election of faith open to all, involving the alternative of the reprobation of refusal and unbelief. God's purpose is thus revealed to save men, to save them in a certain way. When that purpose is resisted, and that way rejected, the salvation is not conferred. The possible election becomes the actual reprobation.

And this brings to view one deeply interesting feature in these elective processes, in strong contrast with what has been the predominant conception upon this subject:—the election in any particular case, as to its advantages and blessings, is not confined to the circle of its primary objects. It has in view, through these, the benefits of others. Abraham, for instance, was called, his family elected, out of all the families of the earth, having, as one of its contemplated

results, that all of the families of the earth should be blessed. So in the national election of Israel. It comes out in the New Testament, as it was anticipated in the prophecies of the Old Testament, that, through Israel, as a people, blessing was to be communicated to all other peoples. So again, the election of the Gentiles is to provoke Israel to zeal; that of the church, to evangelize and bless the world. Evidently the apostles contemplate the blessings of their own election, and the election itself, as communicable; and were ever striving to communicate it to others, with whom they come in contact. Nor do they ever intimate that anything but a want of faith and positive rejection of their message, could interfere with its attainment and possession. "There is," to use the language of another, "a doctrine of Election in Scripture, but it is not a doctrine of arbitrary selection and heartless abandonment; that it has sometimes, I must admit, been supposed to be. The elect of the Bible are not chosen to a monopoly of the divine favor. They are chosen not so much to privilege, as to fruition. Their vocation is to be the light, the salt, the leaven, of the race; and they neglect their duty, at the peril of being cast out as savorless salt to be trodden under foot of men."

Last of all, we are led to see the difference between scriptural and what has too frequently been theological usage as to the meaning of terms in this discussion. The elect and the reprobate are frequently spoken of as comprehending the race; the elect as the sum total of the saved, the reprobate as that of the lost. In the last sense of the word, the election of faith and the reprobation of unbelief, such usage might seem to be justifiable. But even here, there is large material of the race who have not heard of Christ; who will, therefore, be dealt with in a manner and upon principles of which we are not clearly informed; and among these non-elect there will doubtless be diversities of character and destiny. So too with families and material outside

of the election of Israel. Whether individuals—say, Melchisedec, Job, or Balaam—were saved or lost, was decided by the fact of their moral and spiritual condition. They were not of the elect certainly. But they were not, therefore, reprobate. So again with Israel in its present rejection. Individual sons of Israel, living in the twilight, and conscientiously walking according to that twilight, which was salvation to their ancestors, and, like those ancestors, looking for a Messiah to come, but from a knowledge of whom, by invincible ignorance, they have been withheld,—all such material, we gladly leave with Him who knows all,—who knows, in the wisdom and love of infinite forbearance and compassion.

Strictly speaking, these terms “elect” and “reprobate” indicate some specialty of divinely revealed and offered blessing and advantage, and the result of their human reception and treatment. The election to blessing, as to obligation, is consummated in its faithful reception and improvement. The refusal and neglect to do this involves reprobation. To those, who, in the language of Scripture, “were left to walk in their own ways,” “the times of whose ignorance God winked at,” that is mercifully allowed for, such terms are not applicable. They were certainly not the election of revealed blessing. They were not therefore tested as to their use or neglect of such blessing, and, therefore, not reprobate. Their final acceptance or condemnation will be upon other grounds and in view of other principles:—going back to the perfection of the divine character, and, therefore, capable of full and perfect vindication.

And here we pass from the domain of Scripture to that of philosophy. All action, it is sometimes said, is divinely foreseen; it is thus predetermined; and, after all, we have the two classes, by divine decree, actually designated, and fixed as to their condition and destiny: in other words, we encounter the difficulty of moral agency under divine foreordination. This difficulty may be contemplated in its

twofold aspect,—as looked at in the present, and as thought of under the conditions of the past. Taking it in the former of these two aspects, and leaving out the word “fore,”—in other words, eliminating the element of time in this problem of divine ordination and arrangement, and human ordination and arrangement,—is there any real difficulty in their co-ordination—such co-ordination as includes perfectly unimpaired personal agency and determination, of the human as of the divine factor, to the attainment of the result? God's infinite being does not exclude the possibility or the fact of man's finite being. They both really exist. So God's infinite will excludes neither the existence nor the exercise of man's finite will. They both are, and they both act, without any necessary interference. He who makes man accountable, can so deal with him, in the exercise of his power and wisdom, as to keep him to his accountability; and this, even in accomplishing his own divine purposes. Reason, which cannot fully comprehend or describe the mode of such existence and action, is no less helpless to show, that, in such action, there is difficulty or inconsistency. When it can be shown that such difficulty has existence, it will then be time to endeavor to remove it.

But it is foreordination, the other aspect of this subject, and that in which its difficulty and entanglements are usually located. If, however, it is borne in mind that such foreordination has reference to the action of spirit, which, as spirit, infinite or finite, and in its essential constitution, is free; that it is foreordination, not with reference to mechanical, vital, chemical, molecular, or atomic changes or combinations, but to those of free personal agents,—it will be seen that many of these difficulties have no real existence. Divine foreordination, looking at this matter from the aspect of the past, as well as divine ordination, looking at it in the aspect of the present, as that of infinite divine capacity, takes full account of all the facts of the case, all the peculiarities of

the object, as of the agent to which it is directed. Human personality, in its existence and in its exercise alike, is taken account of in divine foreordination, as to their results and consequences. The actions and their results are known or foreknown, as free actions. If they are so in reality, they will be known by a perfect Being to be so. Knowing a fact, whether by divine or human knowledge, does not make it. It must be either an actuality or a possibility, before it can be known. To Him who knows all things from eternity, the act, of course, is as if it had taken place. But that does not make it take place. The divine freedom, it has been well said, is not at all interfered with, through the perfection of the divine knowledge. Just as little does that knowledge interfere with the freedom and accountability of finite human agents. God reveals himself as dealing with men according to their characters, as they belong to certain classes. As they manifest character, and range themselves in these classes, they make manifest the grounds of the divine ordination. The ultimate and unconditional ground in such case is with reference to the essential character, the proximate and conditional ground is the personal choice and conduct which makes the individual a partaker of such character. And the peculiarity of Scripture is that it deals with men in reference to this latter. While it represents God as sovereign in his modes of dealing, and in the principles of his divine administration, it makes each man accountable, as an individual, for the way in which, under these principles, or in any particular mode, he comes under treatment. Just as every such an one must render an account to God; so, in the rendition of that account, he "bears his own burden."