

# A Visit To Jesus To Enquire About Election

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I was agreeably pleased the other day, in beholding a party of my grandchildren at a plate of fruit. Every one of them, I perceived as I looked on, was gathering, one by one, the object of his choice. Neither did this election cease with them, until the whole, except the refuse, had been taken. How unconscious (said I to myself, as I marked their conduct,) are these children of the censure which they are passing on the world? They are, every one of them, actually engaged in preaching and practising that very doctrine of election, which all carnal and unenlightened minds are so much offended at in God.

But, as I ruminated on the subject further, I began to discover that these children of mine, (Genesis 48:5) were not the only preachers and practisers of election. It appears from the history of mankind, that the whole earth is continually engaged in the same pursuit. Perhaps there is not an individual of the human race, however diversified by nation or climate, but what, day by day, is thus occupied. And yet, strange to say, not a son or daughter of Adam, as long as they remain in the unrenewed state of an unregenerate mind, but what revolt at the doctrine; and while they are thus gratifying themselves in their own choice of things, take offence at the exercise of this freedom in God!

I have elsewhere observed (in my Poor Man's Commentary) on this subject somewhat particularly; that from the wayward capricious temper of the little child, the petulancy and ill-humour of the man of grey hairs, how fully to be seen is the conduct which they manifest in all their pursuits and desires; in the object of their approbation or dislike; their predilections or hatreds. They have their choice or aversion as it respects their company, their food, their dress, their pursuits, their conversations. At their table, if through the Lord's bounty they have ample circumstances, they will spread abundance; and will choose here or there, reject or take, as their fancy shall direct. And this, not unfrequently, without either rule or reason; without either wisdom or good sense; nay, sometimes to their sorrow, when from indiscretion they have made a wrong choice, and induced sickness and pain. And should any one upon those occasions venture to call their judgment or their right in question, what resentments have sometimes followed? Is this preaching and practising election, or is it not? But when the Judge of all the earth proclaimeth His holy will and pleasure, on this point, and saith, I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious: and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy

; up riseth the proud, unhumbled heart of man, in boilings of the most fiery wrath, and the scum of bitterness runs over the pot of his malignity in deadly displeasure, against the justice of the decree. So then, according to this inverted order of things, man insists upon a right of freedom, which he denies God; and the creature claims a sovereignty, which he would withhold from the Creator! Reader! Ponder well this statement of things, and mark its correctness.

There is but One Being in the universe, who is capable of choosing rightly and whose election or reprobation cannot but be founded in unerring wisdom, and yet this Holy One, according to man's decision, shall be the only One precluded from this privilege! Can there be a more glaring and palpable proof of the desperately wicked state of the human heart!

I found my mind very powerfully led out to the contemplation of this subject. And, according to my usual custom, when at any time more than ordinarily engaged in the study of divine things, I love to consult the Wonderful Counsellor! There is somewhat always relieving to the mind, when, under exercises of any kind, the child of God can unbosom himself to Him. It is always profitable to spread our concerns before the Lord. His throne of grace is everlastingly open. He Himself is always thine. He waits to be gracious. And His people need no introduction, as at earthly courts, when God the Spirit leads out the soul upon the person of Jesus. According to Christ's own words: he may go in and out, and find pasture. Under these impressions I hastened in my visit to the Lord. He saith Himself, I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit; which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go (Isaiah 48:17).

It struck me then while before the Lord; and it strikes me now again in the same forcible manner, that God by this very process, in causing every human being to do that daily themselves, which they are so much displeased at in Him, hath taken the most effectual means to demonstrate His own glory and man's presumption. For while, from the first dawn of reason in childhood, in which the mind can aid, to the latest hour of old age, if all practise themselves what they dare to condemn in Him, doth not every one of them thereby sign the mittimus of his own sentence? Surely, that solemn scripture is awfully fulfilled, in which the Lord hath said; Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant! (Luke 19:22).

Nay more; the Lord's decision on this matter becomes the more glaring and pointed; because it should seem, as if it was only in this instance concerning election, that the Lord makes mankind to pass judgment upon themselves. It is God's sovereignty which is struck at, by this rebellion of man. Hence, therefore, that sovereignty takes this very method to assert and justify His right by an appeal to what they call theirs. There are no other of the attributes of God, which the unrenewed nature of man presumes to quarrel with and to arraign, but this of His sovereignty; and this only, when exercised in election. Well then, for the full conviction of the sinner on his own ground, and to silence and confound him forever, under the

condemnation of his own heart, the Lord creates him into an office, of which he himself is not at the time conscious, and makes him his own judge. In the very constitution of his nature he is so formed, with dispositions of liking and disliking, of approbation and disgust, that in the exercise of the sovereignty of his own mind (and those exercises are at the same time so constructed, that no laws of God or man can control them), he is everlastingly electing or rejecting, choosing or refusing as his will directs. In this process of the human frame, the Lord forms a mode of trial, which ariseth out of the very constitution of man. Each is his own judge. He shall be tried by his own peers. His own elections or rejections are, in his esteem, his own rightful lords. These are his nobility of inheritance; his right, his just claim. These shall judge him. So then, here is a court he cannot dare impeach. Here are jurors he cannot challenge, for he himself hath impanelled them. Here is a sentence he must abide by; for it is passed by himself, and in the court of his own conscience. And as that sentence, in every instance, claims the right of election in man, what an unanswerable determination doth it bring with it to the right of election in God? And let the reader now say what shall arise, at the retribution of all things, to prevent the everlasting condemnation of every man, on his own ground, who, while demanding the freedom of choice in himself, dares to contend the point with God?

Yes! Indeed there is a way, and a wonderful way it is, by which that sentence may be, and by which indeed that sentence hath been, in innumerable instances, rescinded; namely, when by an act of grace from that very sovereignty men have called in question, the Lord hath taken occasion to magnify the riches of His love; and by the exercise of that power, against which they had so daringly murmured, they themselves have been brought over to bless God for that very election manifested towards them, which they had before taken such offence at being shewn to others. Did God, indeed, intend such a process for purposes so blessed? Did the Lord adopt this method, among all the stores of His grace, to assert and maintain the justice of His own claim against the reproaches of men; who, while they would deny Him His right, so impudently and unjustly claim what they think their own? And is this the manner of men, O Lord God! Oh! The wonderful ways of a wonder-working God!

But here I pause, indeed I can go no further, until that I have first fallen down to the dust of the earth, before the sovereign majesty of my God, under the deepest sense of self-abasement and abhorrence! How long, and how daringly violent did I myself oppose this glorious truth; which now, through thy grace subduing my rebellion, and teaching my soul its blessedness, is become my greatest joy and delight! Lord! Thou knowest well with what bitterness of a fallen nature I contended against the sovereignty of thy grace, in thy free-will election; while, in the very moment, audaciously insisting upon my own power, in a free-will ability of serving thee! Oh! What mercy hath been shown me, in the recovery of my soul from a delusion so awful!

And how many are there of God's dear children, at this present moment, under the same mistaken views, as I once was? They themselves, the unconscious partakers of God's electing grace, while in judgment, contending against it! What a deception the human heart is to itself, while in an unrenewed state of nature? Yea, what darkness and corruption still lurk there, even after the Lord hath called by grace? Should these lines meet the eye of any of the latter description, and should the grace shewn to me be shewn them, very sure I am that whenever the Lord rescues them from the error of their mind, they will stand amazed as I still do, In the recollection of former rebellion. And with me, they will be at a loss which to admire most, the Lord's forbearance, or our presumption.

On the doctrine of election, there is one very striking consideration, which, since the Lord wrought upon my mind to the belief of it, hath operated upon me, at all times, most forcibly! I mean that the whole persons of the Godhead have uniformly preached it, and are everlastingly preaching it to the church.

God the Father in His choice of Christ, as the Head and Husband of His people, calls upon the Church to receive Him, and to accept Him as His chosen. Behold! My servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth! (Isaiah 42:1). And it is worthy our highest remark, in confirmation of this leading truth, that Christ was expected by the people under this character of God's chosen. For when the enemies of Christ rejected Him as the Messiah, they still, in the same moment, acknowledged that Christ when come, would come as the chosen of God (see Luke 23:35). And as God by election chose Christ, so the Church, in every individual member, is spoken of as the same. For, speaking to the Church, the Lord saith, Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me, above all people, Exodus 19:5 (see Deuteronomy 32:9; Isaiah 43:21; Malachi 3:17, 18; Ephesians 1:4).

God the Son, in like manner hath been, and still is, by the ministry of His word and teaching, the great Preacher in His church of the doctrine of election. Indeed, what are all the heads of His sermons in the days of His flesh, but so many sweet and gracious expressions, in proof, how much His soul delighted in His Father's choice of Him, and the Church in Him? Who can read the thanks, which Jesus gave the Father, upon numberless occasions of this sort, for His distinguishing grace to His people, without being led to see that the very heart of Jesus was wrapped up in holy joy, in the view of God's electing love. His whole soul seemed to be going forth with delight that the Father had hid His mysteries in grace from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes (Matthew, 11:25, 26). Nay, what was it that called forth the bitterness and wrath of the Jewish synagogue against the person of Jesus, but for preaching this doctrine? It is said that they heard the Lord, not only with temper but delight, while in His sermon He spake in general terms, that He came to heal the sick, and preach the gospel to the poor: all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. But when this divine

Preacher, who spake as never man spake, directed His discourse to the special and personal acts of election, and instanced the doctrine in the case of Naaman the Syrian, and the widow of Zidon, the whole congregation were filled with wrath (Luke 4:16-30).

And no less God the Holy Ghost, hath all along, from the first founding of the church, been uniformly preaching, and still is preaching, by the ministry of His word, and the influences of His grace, the doctrine of election. Indeed, the sovereignty of that act of the Lord, the Spirit, in setting apart Israel by ordinances, and in those ordinances signifying the special grace in Christ (see Hebrews 9.8), thereby proving to the church, that the whole was His own personal appointment, becomes an everlasting testimony to this great truth. He it was, who all along ordained services, consecrated ministers, appointed their stations, sent the gospel to one city, and forbade the preaching of it in another, confirmed the testimony of His sent servants, and shewed His marked disapprobation to those who ran unsent, (Jeremiah 1 throughout; Jeremiah 28 throughout; Acts, 13:2, 4; Acts 16:6, 7; Acts 18:9, 10; 1 Thessalonians 1:4, 5). Hence the whole persons of the Godhead have all preached; and are unceasingly preaching the doctrine of election to the church.

If I might venture, in a parenthesis, to make a short observation in this place, I would say, if it be so, as I venture to think I have fully shewn, that the glorious persons in the Godhead have thus preached, and do preach election; can that ministry be sent of God, or founded on the divine pattern, or in the end owned of God, which preacheth it not? Is the doctrine so esteemed in God's sight, and shall it be disesteemed in ours? Have all the persons of the Godhead deemed it essential to the health and welfare of souls and will any who profess to minister to the health and welfare of souls in preaching, venture to think otherwise, keep it back, yea, deny it? Let the reader pause over these solemn questions, for they are very solemn.

Did not the Son of God make this one doctrine of Election the very bottom of all others in His gifts to men, when He declared, that the object for which all power was given unto Him over all flesh was, that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him (John 17:2). And are there any who profess to be moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon them the office of ministers in the church, that disbelieve this truth themselves, and would teach others to disbelieve it also? Oh! the blindness and ignorance of the unhumbl'd heart of man in an unregenerate state! What an awful condition must that man be in, who thus lightly esteems the sovereignty of God!

What a still more awful state must that man be in, who comes forward with unblushing confidence to preach or write against it, who must have subscribed to it before he could have first entered the ministry, and now takes pains to publish his shame, in openly denying what he then subscribed! Such a man, of whatever rank or station he may move in among men, must be beheld in the greatest abomination in the sight of

God!

But to return to the view of the doctrine itself. The preaching this leading truth by the Lord Himself in His threefold character of persons, not only gives the most absolute decision to its importance, but is in the place of a thousand arguments to manifest it's imperative claim that it should be preached in all the churches. And indeed, under the sanction of that high authority, it strikes my mind moreover, that such is the nature of it in its own principles, that but for God's choice of the church, and the preservation of the church in that choice, the church itself would have wanted support, neither could have had an adequate support to have rested upon, either for the time state upon earth, or the eternal state in Heaven. As this view of the subject may not be very generally considered, I will thank the reader for his indulgence, while I state it a little more particularly.

When God was pleased to go forth in acts of creation, and called into being our nature in the person of the first earthly man Adam, we are taught in Scripture that he was created holy before God (Genesis 1:27). And indeed, coming out of the hands of an infinitely wise and holy Creator, he could not be otherwise than holy. But then it should be remembered that holy as his nature then was by creation, it was an holiness liable to change, from the very mutability of his nature: for consistent with the creature-ship of man, he could be no other than a changeable creature; because, unchangeableness belongs only to God. It is one of His distinguishing attributes.

Hence, therefore, it must follow, that this very changeableness of man's nature, made him liable to fall, and fall he did, as Scripture relates soon after his creation.

Now it is plain, from the Scriptures of truth, that God had great purposes in view in the creation of man. His fall led to some vast designs in the scheme of grace. To carry on those designs, and to accomplish those great purposes, which from everlasting had occupied the mind of God towards His church; besides this created holiness which God had formed man in; He had, by election grace, given him another, and by far an infinitely greater holiness in an union holiness in Christ; which from being Christ's holiness and to be enjoyed only in Christ, and from an union with Christ, became subject to no change from man's mutable nature; and being placed in safer hands than his own, was liable neither to loss or alteration. This doctrine is blessedly taught the church in many places in the word of God but in none more plain and gracious than in that sweet Scripture, in which God is said to have chosen the church in Christ before the foundation of the world, that it should be holy and without blame before Him in love (Ephesians 1:4). See also Romans 8:29, 30. Hence, therefore, though by the fall the whole race of men, (and consequently the whole church included) lost all their created holiness, yet the church, from her everlasting union with Christ her head in election, had remaining an holiness in Christ, which no sin in them could touch, nor Satan destroy. Being in Christ Himself, as

the Head of His body the church, the members had it only derived from Him: and thus it was placed beyond their own power to lose, or devils to take away. The mutability of their nature could have no effect in this instance. Their election in Christ formed a security of preservation in Christ. All safety being found in Him, and from Him, and by Him; and who is therefore, and on this very account, commanded to be called the Lord our Righteousness; and being both in Himself and to all His people, the same yesterday, today, and forever! (Jeremiah 23:6, Hebrews 13:8).

It is in my esteem a very high proof this, of the great blessedness of election: and whatever other mercies besides this may be included in it, I do not presume to say; but thus far, through grace, we discern that our security in holiness is founded on it. We have holiness only in Christ. He is our holiness, yea, all our holiness; and well is it for the church it is so; for by virtue of it, both our holiness and our happiness are placed beyond the reach of Satan, and all danger from our own mutability.

And although it is not immediately connected with our present subject to consider, yet it may be observed, that the preservation of angels, and therefore called elect angels, ariseth from a similar cause. For their nature, however higher than our nature in the scale of intellect it may be, yet, being creatures as ourselves, they necessarily are liable to change, and fall, as well as man; yea, and not only might change and fall, but certainly would do both, unless upheld by a power superior to their own. There can be indeed nothing in creatures, simply as creatures, which could preserve from it: for of the highest order of created beings it is said, Behold! He putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly; that is, with weakness (Job 4:18). Hence we read of some that fell, and of whom it is said, that they kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation (Jude 6). And we read also of others, which are called elect angels (1 Timothy 5:21); that is, preserved from falling by election grace; being kept from the mutability of their own will in their own nature, by the sovereignty of God's will in electing and preserving grace.

But it should be observed at the same time, according to the Scripture statement, that elect angels and elect men, differ very materially in the nature of that grace manifested to them. Elect angels are made so, by the sovereignty of God's power in dominion over them. Elect men, from grace union with Christ. Elect angels are said to excel in strength, to do God's commandments, and to hearken to the voice of His word (Psalm 103:20). The church elect in Christ, is chosen in Christ, to be holy and without blame before God in love. The former are kept by dominion; the latter by union. Angels are upheld by divine strength; the church is upheld by oneness with her Lord. The one is made faithful as a servant; the other is interested as a wife. Hence the difference is incalculably great, and the blessedness and security in proportion also. While God is pleased to preserve the elect angels in that holiness He hath created them in and upholds them in, they cannot fall. But should it please Him to withhold the arm of His power, the mutability of their nature would soon appear. I am

not supposing such an event probable; for, on the contrary, there is full authority from Scripture to conclude the thing impossible. But I am simply stating a supposable case, by way of drawing the line of distinction between the election of angels and the election of men. The blessedness of the church in her election in Christ, makes her everlastingly secure, in that her union with Christ brings up after it an interest in all that belongs to Christ. And as Jesus hath said, so the fact is undeniable; because I live, ye shall live also (John 14:19). And the Holy Ghost, by one of His servants, hath sweetly borne testimony to the same, when directing the Epistle of Jude to the church, he saith, To them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called (Jude 1). Here is a full constellation of the whole doctrine brought together into one point of view, which shines with complete lustre, like the Pleiades of the heavenly bodies, in the electing love of the Father, the preserving grace in the Son, and the effectual call of renewing mercy in the Holy Ghost.

What a subject is opened to the church in the contemplation of God's sovereignty in this one branch of it! What vast blessings are folded up in God's election! And yet, how little studied, how little known, how little regarded by the church of God! This river of divine love hath been running from all eternity. Before the present state of the church, its mighty course lay hidden and concealed. At creation it arose above ground, and in all those vast events in the person and offices of Christ in redemption, it hath manifested itself in all its sovereign properties, and the streams thereof make glad the city of God. To this one source we owe all our mercies. Chosen in Christ, given to Christ, made holy in Christ, preserved in Christ, and called in Christ; and unto the praise of the glory of His grace who hath made us accepted in the beloved (Ephesians 1:3-7). Hence, from one eternity to another, the church of God hath been, now is, and everlastingly must be blessed in Christ, from a union with Christ. She now stands, during her present being, as upon the isthmus of time. The eternity past, and to come, surrounds her as an immense, immeasurable continent. The spot she occupies, is but as a grain of sand to the globe. He that placed her upon it will shortly return to take her unto Himself, that where He is, there she may be also (John 14:1,3).

And as the church upon earth, oweth all her safety and all her happiness to her union with Christ, in having been chosen in Christ; so very sure it is, that her everlasting safety and happiness in heaven, can arise out of no other principles. All creatures, as creatures, cannot but be subjects of change. To preserve one uniform, steady and fixed sameness, can only be found in what is in itself unchangeable. And that the church hath in Christ her union with Him, brings with it an interest in all that belongs to Him. Here are derived all things that pertain to life and godliness; for He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

For let it be supposed, for the sake of supposition, as was before remarked in the case of elect angels, that there could be a possibility of this union with Christ at any period, however remote, to cease; (blessed be God, such

an idea is not supposable but in the imagination, the thing itself being impossible;) but if the electing love of God could be withdrawn, there would be nothing left to preserve the church, either in holiness or happiness, either in purity or glory. For the church hath no holiness or comeliness in herself. All is in Christ, and from Christ. Her purity, her righteousness, her glory; all are derived from Him. Like the planet of the night, whose brightness depends upon reflections from the sun; so the church shines but from Christ. And upon the bare supposition, that God's electing love should be suspended, and the union in Christ to cease; nothing could preserve the church, even in heaven itself, from a fall like that of the fallen angels. Yea, darkness and horror would succeed, as those we read of under the fifth vial, who are said to have gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven (Revelation 16:10, 11).

Pause, reader, over the marvellous subject of God's sovereignty in election.

What imagination of the human mind is competent to take in a thousandth part of the events connected with it? How shall any man form conceptions concerning the eternal purposes of God in the design of it? And more especially, what views shall that man have of discriminating grace, who, by the new birth of God the Spirit, knows himself to be a partaker of the unspeakable gift in Christ? Indeed, indeed, what a train of thought must that one view alone awaken in the soul, that nothing can arise through all the countless ages of eternity, to do away the cause and effect of those eternal and unchangeable purposes, given to the church in Christ before the foundation of the world? Yea, eternity itself must end, and the immutability of God's counsel come to nought, before the church shall lose her union with Christ, or her everlasting holiness and glory in Christ.

And although the carnal, the graceless and the ungodly, in this, and every other, Christ-despising generation are so desperately displeased, at the exercise of God's sovereignty in election; yet, however unconscious of it, they are more indebted to it, than they are aware.

The apostles Peter and Jude, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, have shown the wickedness and folly of those men, under the strong expression of having denied the Lord that bought them (2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4). For most certain it is, that the Lord Jesus hath bought the world and all things in it: both the persons of the ungodly, and the preservation of the world itself, until His redeemed, His chosen, are safely gathered out of it. Thousands there are which belong to Christ, which are yet to be born in nature, before they can be new born in grace. Hence, therefore, the world must stand; and the ungodly in it which do not belong to Christ in covenant relationship, but yet, from whom in the generation of nature, Christ's seed in grace, shall spring, must continue; and, therefore, when such despise Christ, and deny Christ, they may be said, to deny the Lord that bought them. And to this purport Christ speaketh, in the words of prophecy. The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved; I bear up the pillars of it (Psalm 75:3). He upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). By Him all

things consist: that is, all things are suspended, and kept together, by His power (Colossians 1:17).

What a precious thought is this to the child of God? What an awful consideration to the Christ despising generation! Hence it must undeniably follow, that, but for God's forbearance, until all the members of Christ's body are called home, the world would not have remained to the present hour; but, the world itself, with all the Christless inhabitants thereof would have been swept away with the besom of destruction.

And very sure it is, that, when that great event is accomplished, and the last elect child of God is brought home and housed in glory, then will the desolations of the earth take place. The same day Noah entered into the ark, the foundations of the great deep were broken up, and the world was destroyed by water. No sooner had Lot entered Zoar, than Sodom and Gomorrah were burnt with fire. And, as in these cases, so in the present; the Lord spares the ungodly for His people's sake. The Lord saith now, to His people, as He did then to Lot, I cannot do anything till thou be come thither (Genesis 19:21, 24).

If sinners of the present hour had a consciousness of these things, their treatment of God's people would not be what it now too often is. Neither would they manifest to the sovereignty of God's election, that contempt they now do, but would find cause to say with them of old: except the Lord of Hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah (Isaiah 1:9).

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