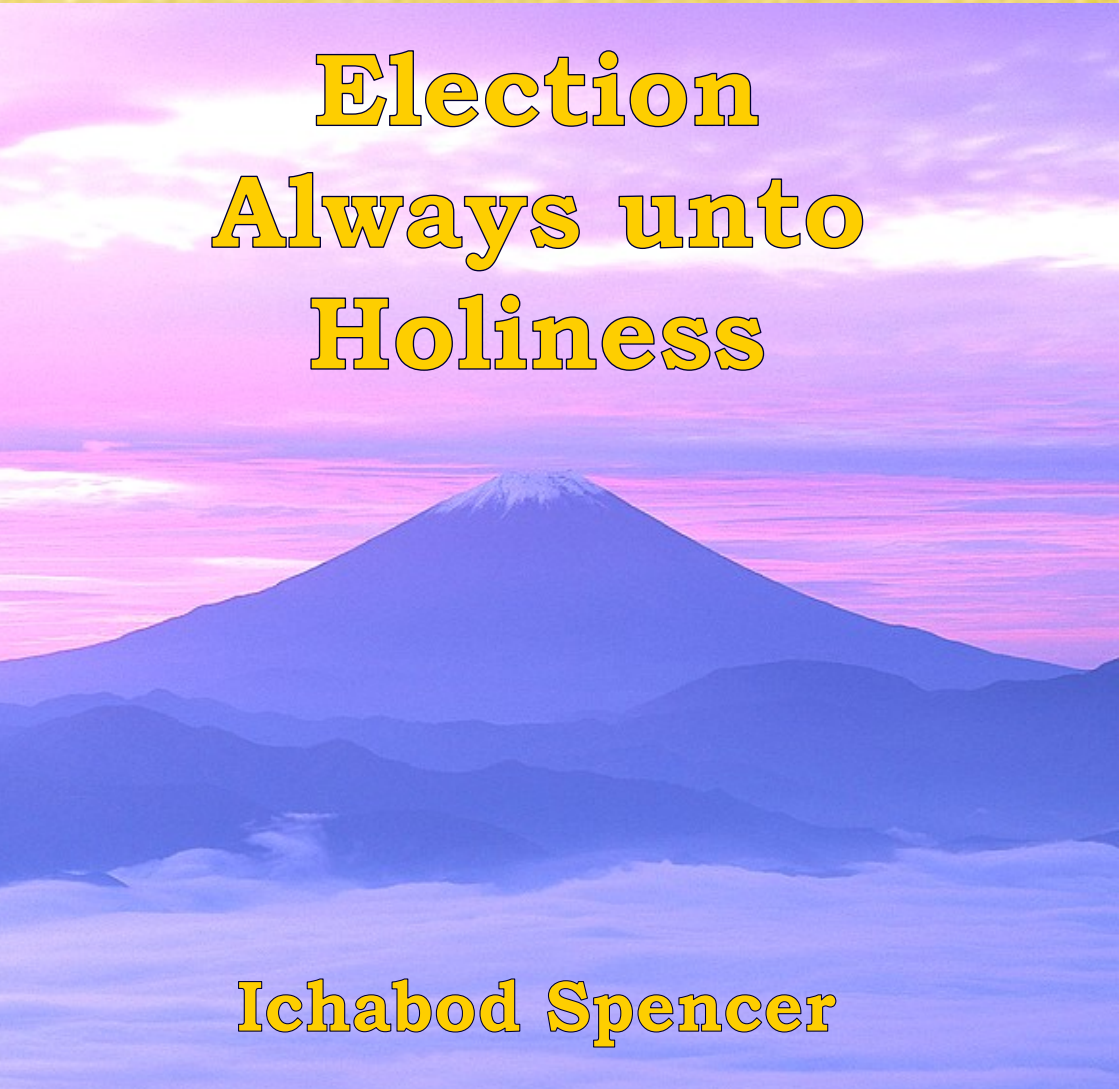




**Election
Always unto
Holiness**



Ichabod Spencer



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“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” Ephesians 1:3-4.

Four ideas are peculiarly prominent in these words. The first is the ascription of praise and blessing to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle, just commencing his Epistle to the Ephesian converts has barely announced to them who it is that addresses them, and wished them grace, mercy and peace, before he breaks out into a kind of rapturous exclamation.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
Ephesians 1:3.

He could not proceed, it would seem, to impart to them those counsels and consolations of which his heart was so full before he had lifted up his heart in holy devout thanksgiving and praise to God.

He loved the Ephesian converts. He rejoiced in all their spiritual good. He delighted to unfold to them the riches of the Redeemer’s grace, and furnish them through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; with such principles and promises and timely admonitions and warnings as should aid their advancement in the divine life.

But all that he could do, or they anticipate, flowed from the wonders of grace. There was nothing in all his enrapturing theme but Christ and pardon and heaven, which would let him, for a moment, forget that praise and blessing for it all was due to God.

He seems to have felt that he could not enter into the consideration of Christian subjects, could not unfold or enjoy the rich provisions of Christian grace without remembering at every step that it all came from the bounty of Heaven, the wonderful overflowings of the grace of God.

The very first thought of the Gospel brought the Apostle directly to the grand and the glorious and the delightful sovereignty of God.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

He then follows the reason for this. His second idea is that of the spiritual blessings which God has bestowed, “Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

The word “places” is not found in the original. Perhaps some other word would be as appropriate: “Blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things.” That is, “In grace, mercy, peace, pardon, redemption, and the fruits of the Spirit,” may, perhaps, be the meaning of the passage. But I am more of the opinion that heavenly places is a phrase that more perfectly presents to us the idea which was in the apostle’s mind.

The mode in which his mind revolved the matters of the Gospel seems to me to have been this. He considered the whole as one connected, consistent, certain system well ordered in all things and sure from the beginning to the end, established in the covenant and resting on the faithfulness of God.

He considers heaven, therefore, as already bestowed upon believers. It is theirs by promise and theirs by the possession of something of that holiness which qualifies for it. And when he says, “Blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places,” he means that all the privileges and places of holiness are already bestowed upon believers. They are given in the covenant. They are promised and believers have an invested right in them. They are theirs.

The same idea is found in the sixth verse of the second chapter of this Epistle. “God, who is rich in mercy....hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:4-6.

Where there is grace, there is something of heaven. Spiritual blessings are eternal blessings. Divine life is immortal life.

But we need remark, at present, only the spiritual bestowments. It was on account of them that the apostle makes such an ascription of blessing and praise to God.

Now, the third idea is that of the rule or arrangement by which God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings. It is the rule of

divine, eternal election, the sovereign choice of God.

“Blessed us... in Christ according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” Ephesians 1:3-4.

The fourth prominent idea is the object of the divine choice or the explanation of what it is to which God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world. He chose us that we should be “holy and without blame before him in love.” Ephesians 1:4.

He elected believers that they should be holy, not because they were going to be holy and he foresaw it, but to cause them to be holy. It was his object in election to render them holy and blameless before him in love, a company of holy men and holy women maintaining a careful and blameless walk and growing up in holiness and love till they should be ripe for a translation to heaven.

The amount, therefore, of what is prominent in these words may be briefly expressed in this way. First, the apostle blesses God when he thinks of the Gospel. Second, he does it on account of bestowed spiritual blessings. Third, he tells how they came to be bestowed. They were chosen. And, fourth, he tells the design of God’s choice, that we should be holy.

The doctrine, therefore, to which we invite your attention in this discourse is that the election of God effectually secures holiness in the elect and, thus, we may be assured, prepares them for heaven.

Stated again, the election of God effectually secures holiness in the elect and, thus, we may be assured, prepares them for heaven.

In substantiating this doctrine, our appeal is, first, to the law and to the testimony. The sacred Scriptures, in places too numerous to mention, teach us that God hath chosen saints, elected them in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world.

Some of these passages we are going to recite. And you will notice, while you listen to them, how commonly election and sanctification are coupled together not only, but more particularly, how election is mentioned as the cause of sanctification, how the believer’s holiness, all his holiness, originates in the election of God.

Our text is of this nature. God hath blessed us with spiritual blessings—why?—according as he hath chosen us. It was his choice, his election, which secured spiritual blessings. It was not because we were spiritually blessed, or because he foresaw we should be, that he chose us, but we are spiritually blessed according as he hath chosen us.

He hath blessed us with spiritual blessings according to election and not elected us according to some foreseen spiritual character of good in us.

This is one demonstration from the text itself. There is another.

“He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy.”

He chose us to holiness, therefore, if we are holy. God hath elected believers that they should be holy, not because he saw they were going to be holy. Their holiness was embraced among the purposes of election. When God elected them, he elected them to be holy. It was his object in election that they should be holy and without blame before him in love. And either he—all holy, and omnipotent and changeless as he is—must fail to accomplish the purposes of his choice, or the elect will assuredly receive, at his hands, all spiritual blessings and, finally, be made holy and without blame before him. He chose them for this and his choice effectually secures it.

Other texts, Romans 8:29, “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.”

Conformity to the image of his Son consists in sanctification. And this sanctification, the divine writer tells us, springs from predestination. God predestinated this conformity.

And Romans 8:30, “Whom he did predestinate them he also called.”

This calling is to holiness and it comes from predestination. Effectual calling is one of the results of election.

2 Thessalonians 2:13. “We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”

Salvation is included in election, but not merely freedom from punishment and admission into the presence of God. There is something more. We have a very imperfect idea of salvation not only, but we have a very erroneous one when we conceive of it merely as pardon and a residence among the saints before the throne.

Salvation includes holiness of nature. The sanctified alone can be saved. Let pardon and the mansions of heaven be as they may, the sanctified alone are qualified to get good, to receive blessing and glory and joy from standing in the presence of God. And God hath, from the beginning, chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit. The choice, the election of God, effectually secures sanctification of the spirit.

Then, 1 Thessalonians 5:9. “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation.”

Believers are saved by the appointment of God. In holy, sovereign wisdom he has ordained the end from the beginning and the means for its accomplishment will not be inappropriate to the objects designed.

Ephesians 2:10. “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

God hath foreordained the good works of his people, as the fruits of holiness and not merely their new creation by the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 1:2. “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience.”

A sanctified mind leading to obedience is, therefore, the result of election. But we need not multiply quotations. You are familiar with passages like these. Such ideas are scattered every where throughout the New Testament, and blindness alone can miss them.

The character of believers, their disposition, their qualifications for the service and enjoyment of God, their obedience, their holiness—some one of these—is usually mentioned in the Scriptures in connection with their election. And as the result of

it, indeed, wherever the method in which election operates is brought to mind that method is sanctification.

Believers are elected to salvation, it is true. God is said to have chosen them to salvation. But when the medium of salvation is mentioned, the nature of it, the means of it in the creature, then holiness, sanctification, the qualities of the believer are suggested to us.

Men are sometimes fond of separating these things, but God puts them together. Men, who would fondly indulge the hope of salvation while neglecting the cultivation of a holy temper of mind and holy habits of living, often connect the election of God with the eternal felicity of the elect. but separate the idea of that felicity from the idea of the believer's separation from sin. Men, too, whose wicked hearts are opposed to the sovereignty of God, who hate the doctrine of election and desire to make it appear odious or absurd, often take the same course, and represent the doctrine of election as teaching their character be what they will.

But this is not the election of the Scriptures. They make no mention of such an election. They mention holiness as the result of election and heaven as the consequence and reward of holiness. This is their universal sense. And in numerous passages it is fully and clearly expressed.

Our second point in substantiating this doctrine of election unto holiness is that we make an appeal to the nature of the case, to show that election secures holiness in the elect.

The election of believers is no singular and isolated thing in the economy of God. It is only one item of a great and universal system, the system of predestination.

God, for his own glory, hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. Not some things, but all things. His predestination is just as extensive as his providence. Predestination is God's eternal purpose to rule his universe just as he does rule it. And if men are reconciled to the manner in which he does rule it, it seems to me they need have no quarrel with his determining to rule it so.

Election, then, is embraced in predestination. It is only one item of the eternal purposes, the decrees of God.

Now, the purposes of God are wise. They are reasonable and consistent with the proprieties of things. For God is not the author of confusion and absurdity. And, therefore, when God determined any end to be accomplished, he must have determined the means for its accomplishment. When he chose his people unto salvation, he must have chosen them unto holiness. A renewed soul, a soul conformed to the image of God, a soul disposed to holiness and finding felicity in it, is indispensable to salvation. Without it, salvation is an absurdity, an impossibility.

When God elected saints, therefore, he elected their sanctification. When he chose them in Christ, he chose them that they should be holy. His election effectually secures their sanctification, because, as the universal Lord, he determined how to rule all things, determined all means for all ends, determined to maintain one reasonable, connected, consistent system, wise in its purposes and wise in the method of their accomplishment.

The infinite wisdom of God would be as much dishonoured as his rectitude, by supposing that he resolved to save some of our fallen race without any regard to the means of their salvation or the qualities of those who should be admitted into heaven where there is fullness of joy.

The nature of the case, therefore, demonstrates the position that election secures holiness in the elect of God because, first, election is a part of God's universal predestination.

Second, holiness is the means of which salvation is the end. And, third, holiness is a quality aside from which no election could secure to the soul the felicities of heaven.

And the third point to prove, let us now advert to the tendencies of this doctrine on the minds of men.

Before entering into the particulars of this article we wish it to be noticed in what manner it applies to our subject. Our doctrine is that election secures holiness in the elect.

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” John 15:16.

And, consequently, we should expect that the knowledge and belief of this doctrine would have a sanctifying tendency. We should expect that its effect upon the minds of men as a means

would be a happy effect. Or, to express the idea in another form, when we show that the doctrine of election preached to the people tends to make them holy, then we have presented a very strong kind of proof that election secures their holiness.

We thus show the practical influences of the doctrine, its operations and tendencies.

We do not attempt, indeed, to solve its difficulties. We pass by what is unknown and mysterious to examine the plain facts which everybody can see. We do not attempt to lift the veil which hides the mysterious agencies of the divine hand, but we look on this side the veil, taking the place of an open spectator, beholding the effect wrought on human sensibilities and human character by the great doctrine we preach.

That effect is holiness. The tendency of the doctrine of eternal election is to lead men to the attainment of all spiritual blessings.

Listen to five items of illustration of this point. The first is taken from the history of holiness among men. We wish, my hearers, that you were better acquainted with the history of the Church. We invite you to that branch of study and we do not hesitate to affirm that you will find the most holy and firm and devoted people to have been those whose hearts embraced the doctrine of the sovereign election of God.

This was one of those great principles which laid the foundation of that heroic and devoted piety which achieved the wonders of the Reformation. Those great minds—whose energies, tempered by piety and guided by God—possessed power enough in holy science to fling abroad a light that chased darkness from nation after nation were trained and tutored under the doctrine we preach.

Those great hearts, devoted entirely to the truth, undaunted by terror and not discouraged by difficulty and ready, if need be, to sprinkle with their life's blood the pathway of discipleship, beat quick and beat strong and beat true to the doctrine we preach.

This doctrine has always been dear to the most signal and devoted piety. Those churches have always been the most firm which have embraced it. The whole history of holiness among men will demonstrate to you—if you will examine—that this and

kindred doctrines have always been among those fundamental principles which have founded and fostered and guided the most pure and perfect holiness ever witnessed among human kind.

Look over Christendom. Select those times, or those countries, wherein holiness, true holiness has been most manifest and pure and you have selected the very times and places wherein this doctrine of election was most preached and most heartily believed.

Again, look over all Christendom. Select those times or places wherein the doctrine of election has been opposed, disbelieved, stricken out of men's preaching and the creeds of the churches and you have selected the very times and places wherein Christianity has been shorn of half her power.

How England and Scotland contrast with one another at the present moment. In the established Church of England it is well known that this doctrine and those kindred to it have been very commonly rejected for a series of years and a system of Arminianism has usurped most of the pulpits of the establishment.

And what is the result? At this moment not a few of her ministers are more popish than Protestant. In Scotland, in the established Church, the doctrine of election and its kindred truths were never rejected. And what do you see there?

A purer virtue than the English Church ever had, hundreds of ministers and thousands of private Christians giving up all their churches and all their church property at once sooner than allow a corrupt civil government an opportunity to impose a corrupt ministry upon them.

You will never see such a spirit of sacrificing and suffering for Christ and his truth, where such doctrines as we preach have been discarded. The Puritans, the Covenanters of Scotland and the independents of New England have been trained from the cradle under the doctrine of election and its kindred truths. And among these men there has appeared, from age to age, the most active virtue, the purest holiness the world has ever seen.

History proves that the doctrines we preach tend to holiness. And so plain and indisputable is this, that an able writer of the

Edinburgh Review, who seems to have no friendship for this doctrine, was compelled by the force of a truth so plain in history to make this remark. "Predestination," says he, "or doctrines much inclining towards it, have on the whole, prevailed in the Christian churches of the West since the days of Augustine and Aquinas.

Who were the most formidable opponents of these doctrines in the Church of Rome? The Jesuits, the contrivers of courtly casuistry and the founders of lax morality.

Who, in the same church, inclined to the stern theology of Augustine? The Jansenists, the teachers and the models of austere morals.

What are we to think of the morality of Calvinistic nations, especially of the most numerous classes of them who seem, beyond all other men, to be most zealously attached to religion and most deeply penetrated with its spirit? Here, if anywhere, we have a decisive test of the moral influence of a belief in necessarian opinions.

In Protestant Switzerland, in Holland, in Scotland, among the English non-conformists, and the Protestants of the North of Ireland, in the New England States Calvinism was long the prevalent faith and is probably still the faith of a considerable majority. Their moral character was, at least, completed and their collective character formed, during the prevalence of Calvinistic opinions.

Yet where are communities to be found of a more pure and active virtue?" Close quote.

Thus spake a mere political, literary writer. He knew from history, that such doctrines as we preach universally give rise to the most active virtue. They tend to holiness.

Second point. This doctrine tends to holiness because its proper and common effect is to make men humble.

There are few obstacles to holiness more powerful than human pride. Pride of heart is opposed to gospel grace. God often complains of it in men and often enjoins the opposite graces of meekness and humility. The doctrine of election has a tendency to diminish pride and finally eradicate it from the hearts of his

people. This doctrine admonishes them of their obstinate and wicked state by nature. It shows them that they were so deep in sin and so attached to it that they had not delivered themselves, that they are indebted to the electing love of God, choosing them for himself in Christ Jesus for their present state and joy as Christians and for all they hope ever to attain in the future.

They have not become Christians because they were any better than other people. They are Christians because they were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world that they should be holy. And in his own time and by his own Spirit it pleased God to make them willing in the day of his power and bring them to Christ.

It has a very humbling effect upon the Christian's heart to reflect that he must forever owe it to the choice of God and not to himself that he has been saved. To account for his repentance, for his faith, for his love of holiness, for his prospect of heaven, he must go away from himself, from his merits, and his powers. He must go to the unmerited grace of God. He must go back to the eternal election which God made of him, a poor helpless sinner, before the world was. Thus pride is humbled.

“Not unto us...not unto us, but to thy name give glory” Psalm 115:1.

And, thus, the believer under view of this doctrine becomes more and more meek and lowly of heart. He is subdued. The asperities of his character are softened. His loftiness is laid low. And he attains more and more of the childlike, meek, single hearted and holy temper of the man of God.

Election strikes at the root of pride. It was not any thing in man. It was the sovereign election of God which first opened the least prospect that a sinner could be saved.

And, third, this doctrine tends to holiness, because it eminently calculated to waken feelings of gratitude towards God. What were we that we should have any expectations of good from a holy God? What were we that God should look on us and pity us and love us and choose us in Christ to be his?

The believer is thankful, when he remembers the electing

goodness of God. God did not pass him by and leave him, as justly he might, to the darkness of his sinful condition and, finally, to the sadness and despair of eternal death.

***He saw him ruined by the fall,
But loved him notwithstanding all.
He saved him from his lost estate.
His loving-kindness, oh, how great.***

Fourth, this doctrine tends to holiness, because it tends to show the evil nature of sin.

We can not fully unfold this idea. We hope, however, to be understood. Sin is a thing so improper for the practice of moral beings, such a contradiction to the demands of their nature, such an exception among the things for which moral nature has any provision for resistance that when it has once commenced, it requires the counsel and control of God to arrest its ravages.

Were it not for this counsel it would have gone on in the heart of every sinner forever. His own counsel or power never would have arrested it. It is that one mighty evil which required the action of the eternal mind and is never arrested from working out the damnation of the soul, but by the election of God.

To recover from it, to save the sinner occupied the thoughts, and fixed the choice of God, before the foundation of the world. God elected and Christ covenanted to die and the voice of mercy burst from the skies, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom" Job 33:24.

This doctrine wonderfully discloses the strange nature of sin and thus leads the believer to shudder at its perpetration.

Fifth, this doctrine tends to produce holiness because it increases veneration and reverence for the deity.

The fact is not to be denied, that those who reject this doctrine and its kindred truths, do manifest a most sad want of solemn veneration and awe for the names and the word and the attributes of God. They have a lightness of manner and an unbecoming familiarity when speaking of the deity and even when addressing him in prayer which are often painfully unpleasant to many pious

hearts.

That awe, that solemnity, that solemn recollection of the distance between God and us which ought ever to prevail are wonderfully wanting.

Ours is a doctrine which exalts God upon the throne. It shows him as the infinite, sovereign dispenser of bounty by his own holy unchangeable will accomplishing all the purposes of his eternal election, restraining the wrath of man or causing it to praise him, bringing—by his own Spirit—to the feet of Jesus Christ the objects of his love and, at the same time, hindering no sinner from salvation, but offering it without money and without price.

In this doctrine, God is like himself sovereign, holy, mysterious, and good. Such views of the character of the deity are just and sober and humbling and holy in their influences.

Omitting further arguments, we mention in conclusion some of the lessons of instruction which the view we have taken of this subject furnishes.

First, this discussion shows us the error of those persons who pretend that the election of God in Scripture is only a national election or an election to the enjoyment of privileges and not personal, relating to individuals.

We have seen that believers are elected that they should be holy. God chose them for this. His choice, then, was no mere determination to furnish nations with privileges, but a choice of individuals that they should be without blame before him in love. His choice related to character and not barely to opportunities and privileges.

Second, we see from the view we have taken of the doctrine of election the great mistake of those who represent the doctrine as fatalism, a system fixing the eternal destinies of men, without regard to their character.

We preach no such doctrine. This representation is a monstrous and, I am afraid, a wicked misrepresentation of one of the doctrines of grace which we preach.

Our doctrine is diametrically opposed to this. It represents the character of the Christian, his regeneration, his holiness to be just

as much a matter of God's eternal choice as the salvation of the Christian. It connects these two things together. Indeed, it makes the one stand as the constant and unvarying cause of the other: chosen, that we should be holy. There is no fatalism here.

Our subject shows us the monstrous error of those who tell us if the doctrine of election is true, it is no matter what they do, for if they are elected to be saved they shall be saved, and if not, all attempts would be in vain.

The doctrine of election says no such thing. It tells us directly the contrary. So far from assuring us it is no matter what we do, it assures us most definitely that it has regard to those who are holy and without blame before God in love. God does not hinder our becoming such. On the contrary, he offers us every motive and every aid to that end.

It is the election of God, and that only, which effectually and forever cuts off all hope of salvation without holiness. Election excludes from heaven the unholy. Were there no decision of God on this matter the wicked, in their darkness, might hope, perhaps, in some way to be saved in their sins. But election dashes down such hopes. It assures them that the election of God before the foundation of the world embraced holiness. Those who would be saved must aim to be without blame before him in love.

There never was a more monstrous perversion than the pretence that if election is true it is no matter what we do. It is for this very reason that it does matter what we do. Election is the very thing which calls on us to cultivate holiness and love, because these are the qualities which election will welcome into heaven.

Hence, fourth, we perceive the strange mistake of those who tell us that this doctrine leaves them nothing to do in preparing for salvation. It gives them every thing to do.

They must learn to become holy, as God is holy. Election never saves men in sin. They must repent of it, hate it, and forsake it. They must follow holiness, Hebrews 12:14.

Their very calling is a business to holiness, 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

They must cultivate the fruits of the Spirit, "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness,

temperance” Galatians 5:22.

They are to be made free from sin, to become servants to God, to have their fruit unto holiness and their end shall be everlasting life, Romans 6:22.

Election makes it certain that without holiness no man can see the Lord. And fallen sinners like us have much to do if we would mortify sin in our members and become fit subjects of all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

And finally, fifth, we learn from this subject the great mistake of those who represent the doctrine of election to be a very discouraging doctrine.

It is not. It is the very foundation of hope. Had it not pleased God to choose some to be holy and without blame, what ground could you now have for entertaining the most feeble hope of eternal life? You could find none in your merits, none in your powers and, if this doctrine were gone, none in the provisions, the securities of God.

But since he has chosen some, there is reason to hope. All will not perish. Christ has not died in vain. Election hinders nobody from holiness and every sinner on earth may have just as much evidence of his own election as he has of his own true holiness.

Let him be holy, and he may know God has chosen him. God chooses men unto holiness and, therefore, in every effort they make to be holy, they may have the consolation of reflecting that the electing God beholds their efforts with an approving eye. And not only so, but every step they take in holiness is an evidence of their election of God.

If this is not ground of encouragement, what is?

Men may go on working out their salvation, making their calling and election sure, and be cheered by the unequalled encouragement, that from eternity God had them and their salvation in his eye, that he who has begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, because, if they are holy at all God is blessing them with spiritual blessings in Christ, according as he hath chosen them in him before the foundation of the world that they should be holy and without blame before him

in love.

We leave this subject to your reflection. It calls you, my dear hearers, to the most careful and blameless walk. Election and holiness go hand in hand. Never separate them. The Divine word puts them together. What God's election is you know not. It is hidden among those veiled mysteries which lie beyond the darkness that envelops his throne. But you do know you are called to holiness. Election calls you to it. It dashes down your pride. It tells you that God reigns and will reign and assures you that there is no election or calling of God but this, that ye should be holy and without blame.

Go, then, submit your soul to a sovereign God. Submit it to him in Christ. Go work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Go make your calling and election sure. Go where God is calling you in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. And though you are dead in sin, you shall be made alive unto God. And, finally, you shall go to the full and eternal enjoyment of all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

God grant it to you, through infinite grace in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen and amen.



“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

Ephesians 1:3-4.

