



The Doctrine of Election



Part Five

A. W. Pink



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9. Its Perception

Thus far we have dwelt mainly upon the *doctrinal* side of election; now we turn more directly to its experimental and practical aspect. The entire doctrine of Scripture is a perfect and harmonious unit, yet for our clearer apprehension thereof it may be considered distinctively in its component parts. Strictly speaking it is inadmissible to talk of “the doctrines of grace,” for there is but one grand and divine doctrine of grace, though that precious diamond has many facets in it. We are not warranted by the Language of Holy Writ to employ the expression the doctrines of election, regeneration, justification, and sanctification, for in reality they are but parts of one doctrine; yet it is not easy to find an alternative term. When the plural “doctrines” is used in the Word of God, it alludes to what is false and erroneous: “doctrines of men” (Col. 2:22), “doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1), “divers and strange doctrines” (Heb. 13:9) —“divers” because there is not agreement among them.

In contrast from the false and conflicting doctrines of men, the truth of God is one grand and consistent whole, and it is uniformly spoken of as “the doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:16), “sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Its distinctive mark is described as “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3)—the doctrine which produces and promotes godliness. Every part of that doctrine is intensely practical and experimental in all its bearings. It is no mere abstraction addressed to the intellect, but, when duly apprehended, exerts a spiritual influence upon the heart and life. Thus it is with that particular phase of God’s doctrine which is now before us. The blessed truth of election is revealed not for carnal speculation and controversy, but to yield the lovely fruits of holiness. The choice is God’s, but the salutary effects are in us. True that doctrine must be applied by the power

of the Holy Spirit to the soul before those effects are produced; for here, as everywhere, we are entirely dependent upon His gracious operations.

The first effect produced in the soul by the Spirit's application of the truth of divine election is the promotion of true *humility*. Pride and presumption now receive their death wound: self-complacency is shattered, and the subject of this experience is shaken to his very foundations. He may for years past have made a Christian profession, and entertained no serious doubts of the sincerity and genuineness thereof. He may have had a strong and unshaken assurance that he was journeying to heaven; and during that time he was utterly ignorant of the truth of election. But what a change has come over him! Now that he learns God has made an eternal choice from among the children of men, he is deeply concerned to ascertain whether or not *he* is one of heaven's favourites. Realizing something of the tremendous issues involved, and painfully conscious of his own utter depravity, he is filled with fear and trembling. This is most painful and unsettling, for as yet he knows not that such exercises of soul are a healthy sign.

It is just because the preaching of election, when accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit (and what preaching is more calculated to *have* His blessing than that which most magnifies God and abases man!) produces such an harrowing of heart, that is so distasteful to those who wish to be "at ease in Zion." Nothing is more calculated to expose an empty profession, to arouse the slumbering victims of Satan. But alas, those who have nothing better than a fleshly assurance do not wish to have their false peace disturbed, and consequently *they* are the very ones who are the loudest in their outcries against the proclamation of discriminating grace. But the howling and snapping of dogs is no reason why the children of God should be deprived of their necessary bread. And no matter how unpleasant be the first effects produced in him by the heart's reception of this truth, it will not be long before the humbled one will be truly thankful for that which causes him to dig more deeply and make sure that his hope is founded on the Rock of ages.

Divine chastisement is a painful thing; nevertheless, to them that are exercised thereby, it afterwards yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). So it is a grievous thing for our complacency to be rudely shattered, but if the sequel be that we exchange a false confidence for a Scripturally grounded assurance, we have indeed cause for fervent praise. To discover that God's purpose of grace is restricted to an elect people, is alarming to one who has imagined that He loves all mankind alike. To be made to seriously wonder if I am one of those whom God chose in Christ before the foundation of the world, raises a question which it is not easy to answer satisfactorily; and to be made to diligently inquire into my actual state, to solemnly examine myself before God, is a task which no hypocrite will prosecute; yet is it one which the regenerate will not shrink from, but on the contrary will pursue it with earnest zeal and fervent prayers to God for help therein.

It is not (as some foolishly suppose) that the one who is now so seriously concerned about his spiritual condition and eternal destiny is in such alarm because he doubts God's Word. Far from it: it is just because he *believes* God's Word that he *doubts himself*, doubts the validity of his Christian profession. It is because he believes the Scriptures when they declare the Lord's flock is a "very little one" (Greek, Luke 12:32), he is fearful that he belongs not to it. It is because he believes God when He says, "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12), and that finding so much filth in his own soul, he trembles lest that be true of him. It is because he believes God when He says "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9), that he is deeply exercised lest *he* be fatally deluded. Ah, my reader, the more firmly we believe God's Word, the more cause have we to doubt ourselves.

To obtain assurance that they have received a supernatural call from God, which has brought them from death unto life, is a matter of paramount concern to those who really value their souls. Those to whom God has imparted an honest heart abhor hypocrisy, refuse to take anything for granted, and greatly fear

lest they impose upon themselves by passing a more favourable verdict than is warranted. Others may laugh at their concern and mock at their fears, but this moves them not. Too much is at stake for such a matter to be lightly and hurriedly dismissed. They know full well that it is one which must be settled in the presence of *God*, and if they are deceived, they beg Him to make them aware of it. It is God who has wounded them, and He alone can heal; it is God who has disturbed their carnal complacency, and none but He can bestow real spiritual rest.

Is it possible for a person, in this life, to really ascertain his eternal election of God? Papists reply dogmatically that no man can certainly know his own election unless he is certified thereof by some special, immediate, and personal revelation from God. But this is manifestly false and erroneous. When the disciples of Christ returned from their preaching tour and reported to Him the wonders they had wrought and being elated that even the demons were subject to them, He bade them “notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names *are written in heaven*” (Luke 10:20). Is it not perfectly plain in these words of our Saviour that men *may* attain unto a sure knowledge of their eternal election? Surely we cannot, nor do we, rejoice in things which are unknown or even in things uncertain.

Did not Paul bid the Corinthians “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves” (2 Cor. 13:5). Here it is certainly taken for granted that he who hath faith may know that he hath it, and therefore may also know his election, for saving faith is an infallible mark of election: “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). Would that more ministers took a page out of the apostle’s book and urged their hearers to real self-examination: true, it would not increase their present popularity, but it would probably result in thanksgiving from some of their hearers in a future day. Did not another of the apostles exhort his readers, “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10)? But what force would such an injunction possess if assurance be unattainable in this life? It would be utterly vain to use diligence if knowledge of our

election is impossible without an extraordinary revelation from God.

But how may a man come to know his election? Certainly it is not by ascending up as it were into heaven, there to search into the counsels of God, and afterwards come down to himself. None of us can obtain access to the Lamb's book of life: God's decrees are secret. Nevertheless it *is* possible for the saints to know they are among that company whom God has predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. But *how*? Not by some extraordinary revelation from God, for Scripture nowhere promises any such thing to exercised souls. Spurgeon put it bluntly when he said, "We know of some who imagine themselves to be elect because of the vision they have seen when they were asleep, or when they were awake—for men have waking dreams; but these are as much value as cobwebs would be for a garment, they will be of as much service to them at the day of judgment as a thief's convictions would be to him if he were in need of a character to commend him to mercy" (from Sermon on 1 Thess. 1:4-6).

In order to ascertain our election we have to descend into our own hearts, and then go up from ourselves as it were by Jacob's ladder to God's eternal purpose. It is by the signs and testimonies described in the Scriptures, which we are to search for within ourselves, and from them discover the counsel of God concerning our salvation. In making this assertion we are not unmindful of the satirical comment which it is likely to meet with in certain quarters. There is a class of professing Christians who entertain no doubts whatever about their salvation, who are fond of saying, as well look to an iceberg for heat or into a grave to find the tokens of life, as search within ourselves for proofs of the new birth. But is it not akin to blasphemy to suggest that God the Spirit can take up His residence in a person and yet for there to be no definite evidences of His presence.

There are two testifiers to the believer from which he may assuredly learn the eternal counsels of God respecting his salvation: the witness of God's Spirit and the witness of his own spirit (Rom. 8:16). By what means does God's Spirit furnish

testimony to a Christian conscience from the Word, but rather by His application of the promises of the Gospel in the form of a syllogism: whosoever believeth in Christ is chosen to everlasting life. That proposition is clearly set forth in God's Word, and is expressly propounded by His ministers of the gospel. The Spirit of God accompanies their preaching with effectual power, so that the hearts of God's elect are opened to receive the truth, their eyes enlightened to perceive its blessedness, and their wills moved to renounce all other dependencies and give up themselves to the mercy of God in Christ.

But the question arises, how may I distinguish between the witness of the Spirit and Satan's delusive imitation thereof? for as there is a sure persuasion of God's favour from His Spirit, so there are frauds of the Devil whereby he flatters and soothes men in their sins. Moreover, there is in all men natural presumption which is often mistaken for faith, in fact there is far more of this mock-faith in the world than there is of true faith. It is really tragic to find what multitudes there are in the religious world today who are carried away by the "strange fire" of wild enthusiasm, supposing that the exciting of their animal spirits and emotions is sure proof that they have received the Spirit's "baptism" and thus are certain of heaven. At the other extreme is a large company who disdain and discredit all religious feelings and pin their faith to an "I am resting on John 5:24," and boast that they have not had a doubt of their salvation for many years past.

Now the true witness of the Spirit may be discerned from natural presumption and Satanic deception *by its effects and fruits*. First, the Spirit bestows upon God's elect *praying hearts*. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him" (Luke 18:7). Notice how right after making that statement the Lord Jesus went on to give an illustration of the *nature* of their praying. It is true that formalists and hypocrites pray, but vastly different is that from the crying of the sin-conscious, guilt-burdened, distressed people of God, as appears from the vivid contrast between the Pharisee and publican. Ah, it is not until we are brought to feel our utter unworthiness and Hell

deservingness, our ruin and wretchedness, our abject poverty and absolute dependency on God's sovereign bounty, that we begin to "cry" unto Him and that, "day and night"—to pray experimentally, to pray perseveringly, to pray with "groanings which cannot be uttered," and thus, to pray effectually.

Let us look for a moment at a prayer of one of God's people, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation" (Psa. 106:4). Now my reader, you are either earnestly seeking that favour by which the Lord remembers His people, or you are not. It is only when we are brought to the place where we are pressed down with a sense of our sinfulness and vileness that we can say in our souls before God, "O visit me with thy salvation." But the Psalmist did not stop there, no more must we: he went on to say, "That I may see the good of *thy chosen*, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance" (verse 5). God's elect pray for and seek after that which no other men pray for and seek after: they long to *see* the good of God's chosen, they seek to be saved with His salvation, and to dwell in the order of His everlasting covenant and eternal establishment.

A second effect of the Spirit's witness is a bringing of us to *submit to God's sovereignty*. Not only do God's elect pray for something which no other men pray for, but they do so in a different manner from all others. They approach the Almighty not as equals, but as beggars; they make "requests" of Him, and not demands; and they present their requests in strict subserviency to His own imperial will. How utterly different are their humble petitions from the arrogance and dictatorialness of empty professors. They know they have no claims upon the Lord, that they deserve no mercy at His hands, and therefore they raise no outcry against His express assertion, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15). That person whose heart is indwelt by the Spirit of God takes his place in the dust, and says with pious Eli, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good" (1 Sam. 3:18).

We read in Matthew 20:3 of a number of men "standing idle in

the marketplace,” which we understand to signify that they were not actively engaged in the Devil’s service, but that they had not yet entered God’s service. Their attitude was indicative of a desire to be religious. Very well, said the Lord, go and work in My vineyard. But a little later the Lord of the vineyard displayed His *sovereignty*, and they were highly displeased. The Lord gave unto the last even as unto the first, and they murmured. The Lord answered “I do thee no wrong. . . . Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?” (verse 15). That was what offended them; they would not submit to His sovereignty, yet He exercised it notwithstanding. “Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” He asked and still asks to every one who in the pride and unbelief of his heart rises up against God’s discriminating grace. But not so with God’s elect: they bow before His throne and leave themselves entirely in His hands.

Third, God’s elect have imparted to them a *filial spirit* so that they have the affections of dutiful children to their heavenly Father. It inspires them with an awe of His majesty, so that they are conscious of every evil way. It draws out their hearts in love to God, so that they crave for the conscious enjoyment of His smiling countenance, esteeming fellowship with Him high above all other privileges. That filial spirit produces confidence toward God so that they plead His promises, count on His mercy, and rely on His goodness. His high authority is respected and they tremble at His Word. That filial spirit produces subjection to God, so that they desire to obey Him in all things, and sincerely endeavour to walk according to His commandments and precepts. True, they are yet very far from being that they *should* be, and what they *would* be could their earnest longings be realized; nevertheless, it is their fervent desire *to* please Him in all their ways.

“The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16). The office of a “witness” is to give testimony or supply evidence for the purpose of adducing proof, either of innocence or guilt. This may be seen from “which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing

or else excusing one another” (Rom. 2:15). Though the heathen had not received a written revelation from God (as was the case with the Jews), nevertheless they were His creatures, accountable to Him, subject to His authority, and will yet be judged by Him. The grounds on which their responsibility rest are: the revelation which God has made of Himself in nature which renders them “without excuse” (Rom. 1:19, 20) and the work of the law written on their hearts, which is rationality or “the light of nature.” Their moral instincts instruct them in the difference between right and wrong and warn of a future day of reckoning. While their conscience also “bears witness,” supplies evidence that God is their governor and judge.

Now the Christian has a renewed conscience, and it supplies the proof that he is a renewed person, and consequently, one of God’s elect. “We trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly” (Heb. 13:18): the bent of his heart was for God and obedience to Him. Not only does the Christian sincerely desire to honour God and be honest with his fellows, but he makes a genuine endeavour thereunto: “Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men” (Acts 24:16). And it is the office of a good conscience to witness favourably for us and unto us. To it the Christian may appeal. Paul did so again and again, for example, in Romans 9:1 we find him declaring, “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,” which means that his conscience testified to his sincerity in the matter. Thus we see again how Scripture interprets Scripture: Romans 2:15 and 9:1 define the meaning of “our spirit bearing witness”—adducing evidence, establishing the verity of a case.

Romans 8:16 declares that our spirit (supported by the Holy Spirit) furnishes proof that we are “the children of God,” and, as the apostle goes on to show, if children, “then heirs” (verse 17) and “God’s elect” (verse 33). Now this witness of our spirit is the testimony of our heart and conscience, purged and sanctified by the blood of Christ. It testifies in two ways, by inward tokens in itself, and by outward proofs. As this is so little understood to-

day, we must enlarge thereon. Those inward tokens are certain special graces implanted in our spirit at the new birth, whereby a person may be certainly assured of His divine adoption, and therefore of his election to salvation. Those tokens regard first our sins, and second the mercy of God in Christ. And for the sake of clarity we will consider the former in connection with our sins past, present, and to come.

The token or sign in our “spirit” or heart which concerns *sins past* is “godly sorrow” (2 Cor. 7:10), which is really a mother grace of many other gifts and graces of God. The nature of it may the better be conceived if we compare it with its opposite. Worldly sorrow issues from sin, and is nothing else but *terror* of conscience and an apprehension of the wrath of God for the same; whereas godly sorrow though it be indeed occasioned by our sins, springs from a *grief* of conscience caused by a sense of the goodness and grace of God. Worldly sorrow is horror only in respect of the punishment, whereas godly sorrow is grief for sin as sin, which is increased by the realization that there will be no personal punishment for it, since that was inflicted upon Christ in my stead. In order that no one may deceive himself in discerning this “godly sorrow,” the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 7:11 has given seven marks by which it may be identified.

The, first is “For behold this selfsame thing [“godly sorrow”] that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you.” The word for “carefulness” signifies first “haste” and then diligence—the opposite of negligence and indifference. There is not only mourning over, but going to work with a will so as to rectify the misconduct. Second, “yea, what clearing of yourselves:” the Greek word signifies “to apologize,” seeking forgiveness: it is the reverse of self-extenuation. Third, yea, “what indignation,” instead of unconcern: the penitent one is exceedingly angry with himself for committing such offenses. Fourth, “yea, what fear,” lest there be any repetition of the same: it is an anxiety of mind against a further lapse. Fifth, “yea what vehement desire:” for divine assistance and strength against any recurrence of it. Sixth, “yea, what zeal,” in performing the holy duties which are the opposite of those sins. Seventh, “yea what

revenge,” upon himself, by daily mortifying his members. When a man finds these fruits in himself, he need not doubt the “godliness” of his repentance.

The token in our spirit with respect of sins *present* is the resistance made by the new nature against the old, or the principle of holiness against that of evil (see Gal. 5:17). This is proper to the regenerate as they are dual creatures—children of men and children of God. It is far more than the checks of conscience which all men, both good and bad, find in themselves as often as they offend God. No; it is that striving and fighting of the mind, affections, and will *with themselves*, whereby as far as they are renewed and sanctified they carry the man one way, and as they are still corrupt they carry him the flat contrary. It is this painful and protracted warfare which the Christian discovers to be going on within himself, which evidences him to be a new creature in Christ. If he reviews and recalls the past, he will find in his experience nothing like this before his regeneration.

Everything in the natural adumbrates spiritual realities, did we but have eyes to see and understandings to properly interpret them. There is a disease called ephialtes which causes its victims when they are half asleep to feel as though some heavy weight was lying across their chest, bearing them down; and they strive with hands and feet, with all their might, to remove that weight, but cannot. Such is the case of the genuine Christian: he is conscious of something within that drags him down, which clips the wings of faith and hope, which hinders his affections being set upon things above. It oppresses him and he wrestles with it, but in vain. It is the “flesh,” his inborn corruptions, indwelling sin, against which all the graces of the new nature strive and struggle. It is an intolerable burden which disturbs his rest, and prevents him doing the things which he would.

The token in our spirit which respects *sins to come* is an earnest care to prevent them. That this is a mark of God’s children appears from “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not: but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18). Note carefully the tense of the verb, it is not, “he doth not sin,” but “sinneth not” as

a regular practice and constant course. From that he “keepeth himself.” This carefulness consists not only in the ordering of our outward conduct, but extends to the very thoughts of the heart. It was to this the apostle referred when he said “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27)—not his physical body, but the body of sin within him. The more we are conscious of evil thoughts and unlawful imaginations, the more we sit in judgment upon our motives, the less likely is our external behaviour to be displeasing unto God.

We turn now to consider the tokens or signs in the Christian’s spirit with respect to *God’s mercy*, tokens which evidence him to be one of God’s elect. The first one is when a man feels himself to be heavily burdened and deeply disturbed with the guilt and pollution of his iniquities, and when he apprehends the heavy displeasure of God in his conscience for them. This far outweighs any physical ills or temporal calamities which he may be subject to. Sin is now his greatest burden of all, making him quite unable to enjoy worldly pleasures or relish the society of worldly companions. Now it is that he feels his urgent need of Christ, and pants after Him as the parched hart does for the refreshing stream. Carnal ambitions and worldly hopes fade into utter insignificance before this overwhelming yearning for reconciliation with God through the merits of the Redeemer. “Give me Christ or else I die” is now his agonizing cry.

Now to all such sin-sick, conscience-tormented, Spirit-convicted souls, Christ has made some exceedingly great and precious promises, promises which pertain unto none but the quickened elect of God. “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37, 38). Is not that exactly suited to the deep needs of one who feels the flames of hell upon his conscience? He hungers and thirsts after righteousness, for he knows that he has none of his own. He thirsts for peace, for he has none night or day. He thirsts for pardon and cleansing for he sees himself to be a leprous felon. Then come to Me, says Christ, and I will meet your every need. “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of

life freely” (Rev. 2 1:6). And mark what follows his thus coming to Christ: “Whosoever drinketh of this water that I shall give him shall never thirst” (John 4:14).

The second token is *a new affection* which is implanted in the heart by the Holy Spirit, whereby a man doth so esteem and value and set such a high price upon the blood and righteousness of Christ that he accounts the most precious things of this world as but dross and dung in comparison. This affection was evidenced by Paul (see Phil. 3:7, 8). Now it is true that almost every professor will *say* that he values the person and work of Christ high above all the things of this world, when the fact is that the vast majority of them are of Esau’s mind, preferring a mess of pottage to Jacob’s portion. With very, very few exceptions those who bear the name of Christians much prefer the flesh pots of Egypt to the blessings of God in the land of promise. Their actions, their lives demonstrate it, for where a man’s treasure is there is his heart also.

That no man may deceive himself in connection with this particular sign of regeneration and election, God has given us two identifying and corroboratory marks. First, when there is a genuine prizing of and delighting in Christ above all other objects, there is an unfeigned love for *His members*. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (2 John 3:14): that is, such as are members of the mystical body of Christ, and because they are so. Those who are dear to God must be dear to His people. No matter what differences there may be between them in nationality, social position, personal temperament, there is a spiritual bond which unites them. If Christ be dwelling in my heart, then my affections will necessarily be drawn forth unto all in whom I perceive, however faintly, the lineaments of His holy image. And just so far as I allow the spirit of animosity to alienate me from them, will my evidence of election be overclouded.

The second corroboratory mark of a genuine valuing of Christ is a love and longing for *His coming*: whether it be by death, or by His second advent. Though nature shrinks from physical dissolution, and though the sin which indwells the Christian

renders him uneasy at the thought of being ushered into the immediate presence of the Holy One of God, nevertheless, the actings of the new nature carries the soul above these obstacles. A renewed heart cannot rest satisfied with its present, fitful, and imperfect communion with his beloved. He yearns for full and complete fellowship with Him. This was clearly the case with Paul: “Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phil. 1:23). That this was not peculiar to himself, but something which is common to the entire election of grace, appears from his word “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto *all* them that *love* His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

Next we turn to the *external* token of our adoption. This is evangelical obedience, whereby the believer sincerely endeavours to obey God’s commands in his daily life. “*Hereby we do know* that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3). God does not judge disobedience by the rigor of the Law for then it would be no token of grace but a means of damnation. Rather does God esteem and consider that obedience according to the tenor of the new covenant. Concerning those who fear Him the Lord declares, “I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him” (Mal. 3:17). God regards the things done not by their effects or absolute doing of them, but by *the affection* of the doer. It is at the heart God chiefly looks. And yet, lest any be deceived on this point, let the following qualifications be prayerfully pondered.

That external obedience which God requires of His children and which for Christ’s sake He accepts from them is not one which has respect to only a few of the divine commands, but unto all without exception. Herod heard the Baptist gladly, and did many things (Mark 6:20), but he drew the line at complying with the seventh commandment to leave his brother Philip’s wife. Judas forsook the world for Christ, and became a preacher of the gospel, yet he failed to mortify the lust of covetousness, and perished. On the contrary David exclaimed, “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto *all* thy commandments” (Psa.

119:6). He that repents of one sin truly repents of all sins, and he that lives in any one known sin without repentance, actually repents of no sin at all.

Again, for our external obedience to be acceptable to God, it must extend itself to the whole course of a Christian's life after conversion. We are not to judge ourselves (or any one else) by a few odd actions, but by the general tenor of our lives. As the course of a man's life is, such is the man himself; though he, because of the sin which still indwells him, fails in this or that particular action, yet doth it not prejudice his estate before God, so long as he renews his repentance for his offenses—not lying down in any one sin. Finally, it is required that this external obedience proceed from the whole man: all that is within him is to show forth God praises. At the new birth all the faculties of the soul are renewed, and henceforth are to be employed in the service of God, as formerly they had been in the service of sin.

Let it be said once more that it is most important that the Christian should be quite clear as to exactly *what it is* his spirit bears witness unto. It is not to any improvement in his carnal nature, nor to sin being less active within him; rather is it to the fact that he is a child of God, as is evident from his heart going out after Him, yearning for fellowship with Him, and his sincere endeavor to please Him. Just as an affectionate and dutiful child has within his own bosom proof of the peculiar relationship which he stands in to his father, so the filial inclinations and aspirations of the believer prove that God is his heavenly Father. True, there is still much in him which is constantly rising up in opposition to God, nevertheless there is something else which was not in him by nature.

Let us here anticipate an objection: some say that it is a sin for the Christian to question his acceptance with God because he is still so depraved, or to doubt his salvation because he can perceive little or no holiness within. They say that such doubting is to call God's truth and faithfulness into question, for He has assured us of His love and His readiness to save all who believe in His Son. They deny that it is our duty to examine our hearts and say that we shall never obtain any assurance by so doing; that

we must look to Christ alone, and rest on His naked Word. But this is a serious mistake. We *do* rest on His Word when we search for those evidences which that Word itself describes as the marks of a child of God. Said the apostle, “For our rejoicing is this, *the testimony of our conscience. . .*” (2 Cor. 1:12). “Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And *hereby* we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him” (1 John 3:18, 19).

But notwithstanding the evidences which a Christian has of his divine sonship, he finds it no easy matter to be assured of his sincerity or to establish solid comfort in his soul. His moods are fitful, his frames variable. It is at this very point the blessed Spirit of God helpeth our infirmities. He adds *His* witness to the testimony of our renewed conscience, so that at times the Christian is assured of his salvation, and can say “*my conscience is also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit*” (Rom. 9:1).

“The sole way of God’s appointment whereby we may come to an apprehension of an interest in election is by the *fruits* of it *in our own souls*. Nor is it lawful for us to inquire into it or after it in any other way.” With those words of the judicious Owen we are in full accord. For our part, we would not dare to place any reliance of an everlasting hope upon any dream or vision we had received, or any voice we had heard. Even if a celestial being appeared before us and declared that he had seen our name written in the Lamb’s book of life, we should place no credence in it, for we would have no means of knowing that it might not be the Devil himself “transformed into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14) come to deceive us. Our election must be certified to us by the unerring Word of God, and there we have a sure foundation on which to rest our faith.

The obligation which the gospel puts upon us to believe any thing respects *the order* of the things themselves and the order of our obedience. When it is declared by the gospel that Christ died for sinners, I am not immediately required to believe that Christ died for me in particular—that were to *invert* the divine order of the gospel. The grand and simple message of the evangel of God’s grace is, that Christ Jesus came into the world to procure a

way of salvation for them who are lost, that He died for the ungodly, that He so perfectly satisfied the claims of the divine justice that God can righteously justify every sinner who truly believes in His Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:26). Consequently since I find myself a member of that class, since I know myself to be a sinner, an ungodly person, lost, then I have full warrant to believe the good news of the gospel. Thus the gospel requires from me faith and obedience and I am under an obligation to render them withal.

Until I believe and obey the gospel I am under no obligation to believe that Christ died for me in particular; but having done so, I *am* warranted to enjoy that assurance. In like manner, I am required to believe the *doctrine* of election upon my first hearing of the gospel, because it is therein clearly declared. But as for my own *personal* election I cannot Scripturally believe it, nor am I obligated to believe it any otherwise, but as God reveals it *by its effects*. No man may justly disbelieve in or deny his election until he be in a condition where it is impossible for the effects of election to be wrought in him. While he is unholy a man can have no evidence that he is elected; so he can have none that he is not elected while it is possible for him to be made holy. Thus, whether men are elected or no, is not that which God calls any immediately to be conversant about: faith, obedience, holiness are what are first required from us.

Before proceeding further let it be pointed out that the elect are usually to be found where the ministers of Christ labour much. Said Paul, "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that *they* may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). That illustrates the principle: the apostle knew that in his evangelical labours he was being employed in executing God's purpose in carrying the message of salvation to His people. To that very end was the apostle sustained by divine providence and directed by the Spirit of the Lord. Take a brief specimen of the method in which he was divinely guided. In his second journey publishing the glad tidings in heathen lands, Paul had been led through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and would have preached the Word in Asia, but

was “forbidden of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 16:6)—for what possible reason? but that God had none of His elect there, or if any, that the time had not yet arrived for their spiritual deliverance.

The apostle then essayed to go into Bithynia, but again we are told, “the Spirit *suffered him not*” (Acts 16:7). Very striking indeed is that, though it seems to make little or no impression upon people today. Next we read, “And they *passing by* Mysia [how solemn!] came down to Troas.” There the Lord appeared unto him in a vision directing him to go to Macedonia, and from this he assuredly gathered that He had called him to preach the gospel there. He thereupon entered that country and proclaimed the good news, and in consequence, God’s elect in Thessalonica obtained salvation. Later, he came to Corinth, where he met with much opposition, and with little success. He seems to have been on the point of departing, when the Lord appeared to him, strengthened his heart, and assured him “I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:10). As the result, he remained there eighteen months and the Corinthian Church was formed.

This grand principle of the Lord’s so directing His servants that His elect are caused to hear His gospel from their lips, receives many striking illustrations in the Scriptures. The remarkable way in which Philip was conducted with the word of salvation to the Ethiopian eunuch, and Peter with the same word to Cornelius and his company, are cases in point. Another example, perhaps more striking still, is the way in which the apostles obtained access to the Philippian jailer with the word of life, who, because of his calling, probably found it impossible to hear their public preaching. Most blessedly do these instances exemplify the words of the Saviour who, when referring to that company which the Father had given Him in Gentile lands, declared “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice” (John 10:16)—hear His voice through His servants and be quickened by the power of His Spirit.

The Lord Jesus never yet sent His servants to labour where He had not a people, which being given to Him by the Father, were

by Him to be brought into the fold. And He never will so send them. But where He has a people, He will there direct His own servants to call that people to Himself, and they like Paul of old will “endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus.” Only the day to come will fully reveal how much—by His upholding grace—they did endure so that the elect might be saved. The elect, then, are to be found where the faithful ministers of Christ labour much. Now, my reader, if you are privileged to live in such a place, then in your own midst you may look for the favoured people of God. The day of golden opportunity is now yours, and it is your bounden duty to respond and yield to the call made by Christ’s servants.

Let us now pass on to something yet more specific. God not only sends His servants to those places where His providence has situated some of His elect, but He clothes His word with power and makes their labours effective. “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you, in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance” (1 Thess. 1:4, 5). That passage is very much to the point, and each clause in it calls for our closest attention. It tells us *how* the apostle became assured that the Thessalonian saints were among God’s chosen people, and how by parity of reason, they too might know and rejoice in their election. Those details have been placed on record for our instruction, and if the Lord is pleased to grant us a spiritual understanding of them, we shall be on safe and sure ground. But in order for this, we must prayerfully ponder these verses word by word.

“Knowing brethren, beloved, your election of God.” How did the apostle know their election of God? Let it be most particularly observed that this assurance of his was obtained *not* by any immediate revelation from Heaven, not by a supernatural vision or angelic message, nor by the Lord Himself, directly informing him to that effect. No; rather was it by what he had witnessed in and from *them*. It was by the *visible fruits* of their election that he perceived them to be “brethren beloved.” In other words, he traced back those effects of grace which had been

wrought in them at their conversion, to the source thereof in God's eternal purpose of mercy. Those tiny rivulets of grace in their hearts the apostle traced back to the ocean of God's everlasting love from which they proceeded. Therein, he indicated to us the course which we must follow, the method we are to pursue in order to ascertain our predestination to glory.

“For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power.” All who pretend to preach the gospel do not actually do so. To allow that they did, would be to grant that there are as many different gospels as there are sects and sentiments in Christendom, all claiming theirs to be the true gospel, to the exclusion of every other. It is therefore a matter of the very highest importance that each of us should know what the gospel of Christ really is, and this must be learned from the Holy Scriptures, under the guidance of God the Spirit. There are numerous counterfeits of it in the world today, and their fraudulency can only be discovered by weighing them in “the balances of the Sanctuary.” Equally necessary and important is it that we ascertain how the gospel should be *received* by us if the soul is to be permanently benefited by it, for according to the apostle there is a twofold reception thereof.

“For our gospel came not unto you in word only.” For the gospel to come to us “in word only” is for God to leave it to its natural efficacy, or the force of its arguments and persuasion on the human mind. Multitudes, in many places have heard the gospel, yet continue in idolatry and in iniquity, notwithstanding the profession which many of them make. When the gospel comes to us “in word only” it reaches the intellect and understanding, but makes no real impression on the conscience and heart. Consequently, it produces only a feigned and presumptuous faith, a faith which is inferior even to that which the demons have, for they “believe *and tremble*” (James 2:19). It is only when the gospel comes to us “in power and in the Holy Spirit” that it is received with a true and saving faith. How necessary it is then, to test ourselves at this point.

There are two extremes into which men fall through lack of the right receiving of God's Word. The one supposes he is possessed

of both will and power to perform works of righteousness sufficient to commend him to the favour of God, and so he becomes “zealously affected, but not well” (Gal. 4:17). He fasts, prays, gives alms, attends church, etc.; and wherein he thinks he fails or comes short, he calls in the merits of Christ as a make weight for his deficiency. This is but taking a piece of new cloth (Christ’s Atonement) and patching into his garment a legal righteousness, hoping thereby to appease a guilty conscience. He continues his religious performances the year round, but never attains to a vital and experimental knowledge of the gospel. All his service is but dead works.

The other extreme is the very reverse of this, but equally dangerous. Instead of toiling to the point of weariness, these work not at all. Being conscious more or less, as all natural men are, that they are sinners, and hearing of free salvation by Jesus Christ, they readily fall in with it, receiving it in their minds but not in their consciences. A superficial and presumptuous faith is begotten, and by a single leap they arrive at a supposed assurance of heaven. But, says Solomon, “An inheritance may be gotten *hastily at the beginning*; but the end thereof shall not be blessed” (Prov. 20:21). These people are great talkers, boast much of their freedom from the law, but are themselves the slaves of sin. They are ever learning, yet never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. They laugh at those who have doubts and fears, yet they themselves have the most cause of all to fear.

Now in marked contrast from both of these classes, are they who receive the gospel not in word only “but in power and in the Holy Spirit.” This is a middle way between these two extremes, and one that is hidden from all unregenerate, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually* discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). When God begins “the work of faith with power” (2 Thess. 1:11), and leads that soul in this middle way, he can at first neither see nor understand it. As it was with the father of all who believe, so it is with all his children: when Abraham was effectually called, he “went out, *not knowing* whither he went” (Heb. 11:8). Those born of the Spirit

are led forth by “a way that they know not” (Isa. 42:16), and until darkness is made light before them and crooked things straight, they cannot understand the way of the Spirit; but when that *is* done, then the highway is “cast up” for them (Isa. 62:10).

The all-important question, then, is, Has the gospel come to me in word only, or in saving power? If the former, then it has been received *without* anguish, trouble, or distress of conscience, for those are the common marks of divine power working in the sinner’s soul. When God’s Word comes to us “in power,” it comes as a “two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12), having the same effect on the heart as a sword does when it is thrust into the body. If the wound be deep, the pain and smart will be very acute. So when the Word of God pierces “even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” it produces real anguish and deep distress. Said Job, “The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit [explained in the next words] ; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me” (6:4). And thus, too, David exclaimed, “Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore” (Psa. 38:2).

It was thus in the experience of Paul. Before the Spirit applied the law to his heart, he was alive in his own eyes, though dead in God’s; but when the commandment came home to him in divine power, sin revived and he died—in his own esteem (Rom. 7:9). The fact is that he, like every other Pharisee, supposed that the law reached no further than the external letter, touching which he considered himself blameless. But when its high demands and searching spirituality was made known to him he found it reached the very thoughts and intents of the heart, and discovered to him the awful depths of depravity in him which was hid before. He found the law was spiritual, but himself carnal, sold under sin. He found—as very, very few do—that his heart was in the very state described by Christ in Mark 7:21, 22. He was compelled to believe what Christ there declared, because he now saw and felt the same within himself.

The first act of faith brings a man to believe that he is in the

very state Scripture declares him to be; at enmity against God (Rom. 8:7), a child of wrath (Eph. 2:3), under the curse of a broken law (Gal. 3:10), led captive by the Devil (2 Tim. 2:26). A heavy burden of sin lies on his conscience (Psa. 38:4), an active fountain of iniquity like the troubled sea casts up its mire and dirt (Isa. 57:20), which baffles all the efforts of an arm of flesh, bringing him into terrible bondage: “our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa. 64:6). He finds himself bound hand and foot with the cords of his sins, and he cries earnestly to God to take pity upon him, and out of his great mercy loose him. He now needs no set forms of prayer, but night and day he cries “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

And *how* does the Lord set him at liberty? By the gospel coming to him “in power and in the Holy Spirit.” God exhibits to him in a new light, the sufferings and death of His Son, by whom His justice was satisfied, His law magnified, His wrath appeased, and a way of reconciliation opened between God and sinners. It is the Spirit’s office to work faith in the heart and to apply the atoning blood and righteousness of Christ to the conscience, by whom the burden of sin and death is removed, the love of God is made known, peace is imparted to the soul, and joy to the heart. Thus, the same instrument which wounded, brings healing. Therefore did the apostle here add, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, *and in much assurance*”—*assurance* of its divine verity and authority, of its perfect adaptability and suitability to our case, of its ineffable blessedness.

“I remember, too, when the truth came home to my heart, and made me leap for very joy, for it took all my load away; it showed me Christ’s power to save. I had known the truth before, but now I *felt* it. I went to Jesus just as I was, I touched the hem of His garment; I was made whole. I found now that the Word was not a fiction—that it was the one reality. I had listened scores of times, and he that spake was as one that played a tune upon an instrument; but now he seemed to be dealing with me, putting his hand right into my heart. He brought me first to God’s judgment seat, and there I stood and heard the thunders roll; then he

brought me to the mercy seat, and I saw the blood sprinkled on it, and I went home triumphing because sin was washed away” (C. H. Spurgeon).

“Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God” (1 Thess. 1:4). How did the apostle know that those Thessalonians were among God’s elect? The next verses tell us: by *the visible fruits* thereof which he perceived in them. Discerning in their lives those effects of grace which had been wrought in them at their conversion, he traced back the same unto God’s eternal purpose of mercy concerning them. And, my reader, the way in which Paul knew the Thessalonian believers were “from the beginning chosen . . . to salvation” (2 Thess. 2:13) must be the method by which every Christian today is to ascertain his or her election of God.

“For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 1:5). Everything turns upon *how* the (true) Gospel is received by us: whether it is merely apprehended by the intellect, or whether it really reaches the conscience and heart for only then is it received with a saving faith. When God’s Word comes to us “in power,” it comes as “a two-edged sword”—cutting, wounding, causing pain and deep distress. When the Word comes to us in power it is not due to any learning or eloquence of the preacher, nor to any pathos which he may employ. The fact that his hearers’ emotions are deeply stirred so that they are moved to tears, is no proof whatever that the gospel is come to them in divine efficacy: creature passions are often stirred by the actings of the stage and thousands are moved to weep in the theatre. Such superficial emotionalism is but evanescent, having no lasting and spiritual effects. The test is whether we are broken and bowed before *God*.

The same thought is expressed again in the next verse, as though *this* is the particular detail by which we most need to test ourselves: “having received the Word *in much affliction*, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (verse 6). How that exposes the worthlessness of the light and frothy “evangelism” (?) of the day! How solemn it is to remember that Christ described the stony-ground hearer as “he that heareth the Word and anon with *joy* receiveth it; yet hath

he not root in himself” (Matt. 13:20, 21). Very different was it with those who were converted on the day of Pentecost, for the first thing recorded of them is, that they were “pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37). Travail precedes birth, and then comes the rejoicing (see John 16:21). These are the questions to be considered—and answered before God: Has the Word rebuked and condemned me? Has it stripped me of my self-complacency and self-righteousness? Has it cut down my hopes, and brought me to lie as a self-condemned felon before the mercy seat?

“People come and hear sermons in this place, and then they go out and say, ‘How did you like it?’—as if *that* signified to anybody. ‘How did you like it?’ and one says, ‘Oh, very well,’ and another says ‘Oh, not at all.’ Do you think we live on the breath of your nostrils? Do you believe that God’s servants, if they are really His, care for what *you* think of them? Nay, verily; but if you should reply ‘I enjoyed the sermon,’ they are inclined to say, ‘Then we must have been unfaithful, or else you would have been angry; we must surely have slurred over something, or else the Word would have cut your conscience as with the jagged edges of a knife. You would have said, ‘I did not think how I liked it; I was thinking how I liked myself, and about my own state before God; *that* was the matter that exercised me, not whether he preached well, but whether I stood accepted in Christ, or whether I was a castaway.’ My dear hearers, Are you learning to hear like that? If you are not, if going to church and to chapel be to you like going to an oratorio, or like listening to some orator who speaks upon temporal matters, then you lack the evidence of election; the Word has not come to your souls with power” (C. H. Spurgeon).

In between the portions quoted above from I Thessalonians 1:5, 6 are two other details: first, “and in much assurance.” When the Word comes home in converting power to a man’s soul, all his doubts concerning its authenticity and authority are removed, and he needs no human arguments to convince him that its author is *God*. All the scepticism of the rationalists and higher critics would be dispelled like mist before the rising sun, if the Spirit was pleased to effectually apply the Word to their hearts. Those

who have been made to feel their dire need of Christ and have perceived His perfect suitability to their desperate condition, have “much assurance” of what the gospel affirms of His person and work. Whatever may have been the case with them formerly, they have no doubt now about His absolute Deity, His virgin birth, His vicarious death, His pre-eminent dignity, as prophet, priest, and king. These all-important things are settled for him, settled forever, and he will declare himself with a positiveness and dogmatism which will shock the sensibilities of the supercilious.

Again it is said, “ye become followers of us and of the Lord.” Here is another mark of election: those who are chosen by the Lord *desire to be like Him*. “Ye became followers of us” does not mean that they said, ‘I am of Paul, I am of Silas, I am of Timothy,’ but that they imitated those eminent evangelists so far as they followed the example which Christ has left us. Ah, *that* is the test my readers. Are we Christlike? or do we honestly wish to be so? Then that is a sure evidence of our election. Do we live by every word of God (Matt. 4:4)?—Christ did. Do we take everything to God in prayer?—Christ did. Do we pray God to bless those who curse us? It is not that we are sinless, perfect; but are we, though often “afar off,” really following Christ? If we are, it is not proud boastfulness to acknowledge it, nor is it self-righteousness to derive comfort therefrom, providing we also grieve over our many shortcomings and mourn over our sins.

“With joy of the Holy Spirit.” Mark the qualifying language: it is not carnal mirth, but spiritual gladness. And observe too, that this concludes the list, for it is ever the Lord’s way to reserve the best wine for the last. Alas, how few professors know anything, experimentally, about this deep, spiritual joy. The religion of the vast majority consists of a slavish attendance upon forms that they delight not in. How many go to some place of worship simply because it is not respectable to stay away, though they often wish it were. Not so with the Christian—when he is in his right mind: he goes to worship the Lord, to hear the voice of his beloved, seeking a fresh love-token from Him, desiring to bask in the sunshine of His presence. And when he is favoured with a

visit from Christ he exclaims with Jacob, “This is the house of God,” a foretaste of heaven.

And now in drawing to a conclusion our remarks upon this fascinating aspect of the subject, there remains one other verse we must ponder: “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10). Those words have been fearfully wrested by errorists. Enemies of the truth have perverted them to signify that, the divine decree concerning salvation is but provisional, conditional on the sinner’s own efforts. They deny that any man’s predestination to eternal life is absolute and irrevocable, insisting that it is contingent upon our own personal diligence. In other words, man himself must decide and determine whether God’s desire for him is to be realized. Not only is such a concept entirely foreign to the teaching of Holy Writ, but to say that the ratification and realization of God’s eternal purpose is left dependent on something from the creature, is sheer blasphemy; and were it true, would not only render our election uncertain, but utterly hopeless.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” These words have also presented a real problem to not a few of God’s people. They have been sorely perplexed to understand how any diligence on their part could possibly make God’s calling and election sure; and even when that difficulty is cleared up, they are quite at a loss to know what form their diligence is to take. Ah, my friends, God has often expressed Himself in the Scriptures in such a way as to test our faith, humble our hearts, and drive us to our knees. Perhaps it may afford most help if we concentrate on the following points. First, the particular people here addressed. Second, the unusual order of “calling and election.” Third, what is the “diligence” here required. Fourth, in what sense can we make our calling and election “sure?”

First, the people addressed. If this simple but essential principle were duly heeded what a mass of erroneous expositions would be avoided. It is the mis-application of Scripture which is responsible for so much faulty interpretation. When the

children's bread be cast unto the dogs, the former are robbed and the latter given that which they cannot digest. To take an exhortation which is addressed to believers and appropriate it, or rather misappropriate it, to unbelievers, is an excuseless offense: yet such has often been done with the verse before us. There is no difficulty whatever in ascertaining the addressees of this divine injunction. The opening verse of the epistle tells us that the apostle is here writing to those who had "obtained like precious faith," so that they were *believers*; while in the verse itself they are styled "brethren" and exhorted as such.

This exhortation, then, is addressed to living saints and not to dead sinners. To teach that the unregenerate can do anything at all toward securing their calling and election, is not only colossal ignorance, but it gives the lie of God's Word. When they are delivering a divine message, the first duty of God's ministers is to draw very definitely the line of demarcation between the Church and the world: it is failure at this point which causes so many children of the Devil to claim relationship with the people of God. Attention to the context will almost always make it clear to whom a passage pertains: whether to the children of men in general or to the children of God in particular. The simplest and most effectual way of making this plain to their hearers, is for them to carefully delineate the *characters* (the identifying marks) of the one and of the other—note how the apostle followed this very course in the first four verses of the epistle.

Second, the unusual order that is found here: "your calling and election." Though at first sight this presents a difficulty, yet further study will show it really supplies an important key to the opening of this exhortation. That which puzzles the thoughtful reader is, why "calling" comes *before* "election," for as we have sought to show at length in previous chapters, effectual calling is the consequence of election, as it is also the manifestation thereof. As Romans 8:28 declares believers are "the called according to His purpose:" that is, the calling is in pursuance of God's purpose. So too in Romans 8:30 it is said, "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called." Likewise "Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but

according to His own purpose” (2 Tim. 1:9). Why, then, are these two things inverted in the passage we are now considering?

It is to be carefully noted that Romans 8:28, 30 and 2 Timothy 1:9 are treating of *God’s* acts, whereas 2 Peter 1:10 mentions calling and election in connection with *our* diligence. It is only by duly noting such distinctions that we can hope to arrive at a right understanding of many of the details of Holy Writ. In Romans 8 the apostle is propounding doctrine, whereas in 2 Peter 1:10 he is pressing an exhortation, and there is a marked difference between those things. When the ways of God are being expounded, they are presented in their natural or logical order (as in Rom. 8:30), but when Christian *experience* is being dealt with, the order in which we apprehend the truth is the one followed. Thus it is here: we are first to make sure that we have been the recipients of an effectual call, for that in turn will furnish proof of our election. The order of God’s thoughts toward us was, election and then calling; but in our experience we apprehend calling before election.

Third, what is the “diligence” here required? There are multitudes who fancy they have received an effectual call from God, but it is merely fancy: instead of prayerfully and diligently devoting themselves to the duty here enjoined, they give themselves the benefit of the doubt. Probably many are quite sincere in their supposition, but they are sincerely mistaken, being led astray by their deceitful hearts. It is far from being sufficient to adopt the doctrine of election as an article of our creed. As one tersely put it:

***Though God’s election is a truth,
Small comfort there I see,
Till I am told by God’s own mouth,
That He hath chosen me.***

And I have no right or warrant to expect that He will ever do any such thing, till I have complied with His requirements in the verse now before us.

That to which I am here exhorted is to first make sure my “calling” of God. This is to be done by accumulating and

strengthening my evidence that I am His born-again child; and that, in turn, is accomplished by cultivating the character and conduct of a saint. And how is that to be achieved? By using the means of grace which God has provided: such as the daily reading of the Scriptures with spiritual meditation thereon; by secret and fervent prayer for divine succour and grace; by cultivating fellowship with God's people, so far as His providence permits this; by keeping faithful watch over our hearts, disallowing all that is unholy; by the strict denial of self and mortification of our members. But we shall receive most help at this point if we attend unto something yet more specific in the context.

In verses 5-7 we are exhorted, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love." Now verse 10 expresses the same duty, but in different words. There is a striking parallelism in this chapter, and it is by noting the repetition (in variation of thought) that we find the chief key to our verse. In verses 5-7 we have an exhortation, and in verse 8 we are shown the result of heeding it. In verse 10 we also have a similar exhortation, and then in verse 11 the result of compliance therewith is shown. Thus our text is to be interpreted in the light of its context. What is the "diligence" here required? Of what does it consist? Verses 5 to 7 tell us. It is by carefully cultivating the spiritual graces therein mentioned that I may ascertain my calling and election.

Fourth, in what sense do we make our calling and election "sure?" First, observe it is *not* "make secure:" they are already secured to every saint by the immutability of the divine purpose, for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). It is not the making of our calling and election sure Godwards, but *manwards*. Nor is it something future which is here in view: it is the present *enjoyment* to ourselves of our calling and election, and of *evidencing* the same to our brethren. By heeding the exhortation of verses 5-7 I am to prove my calling and election, and demonstrate the same to the Church. A

man may tell me he believes in election and is sure that he has been called of God, but unless I can see in his character and conduct the spiritual graces of verses 5-7 then I have to say of him (as Paul did of the Galatians) "I stand in doubt of you." Here, then, is the meaning: make steadfast in your own conscience your calling and election, and make good to others your profession, by walking as a child of God.

Finally, two *consequences* of complying with those exhortations are pointed out. First, "For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (verse 10.) Those who give all diligence to cultivate the spiritual graces mentioned in verses 5-7 (thereby making their calling and election sure, both to themselves and to their brethren), shall never fall from the place of communion with God; shall never fall from the truth into false doctrine and error; shall never fall into grievous sins, and so disgrace their Christian profession; shall never fall into a state of backsliding, so that they lose their relish for spiritual things; shall never fall under sore discipline from God; shall never fall into a despondency so as to lose all assurance; shall never fall into a condition of spiritual uselessness. But, second, "For *so* an entrance shall be ministered unto you *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (verse 11): experimentally so here; fully and honourably so in the future. This is the result and reward of "diligence:" the Greek word for "ministered" in verse 11 is the same as "added" in verse 5!

And now to summarize. How may a real believer ascertain that he is one of God's elect? Why, the very fact he *is* a genuine Christian evidences it, for a believing into Christ is the sure consequence of God's having ordained him to eternal life (Acts. 13:48). But to be more specific. *How* may I know my election? First, by the Word of God, having come in Divine power to the soul, so that my self-complacency is shattered and my self-righteousness renounced. Second, by the Spirit's having convicted me to my woeful, guilty, and lost condition. Third, by having had revealed to me the suitability and sufficiency of Christ to meet my desperate case, and by a divinely given faith causing me to lay hold of and rest upon Him as my only hope.

Fourth, by the marks of the new nature within me: a love for God, an appetite for spiritual things, a longing for holiness, a seeking after conformity to Christ. Fifth, by the resistance which the new nature makes to the old, causing me to hate sin and loathe myself for it. Sixth, by sedulously avoiding everything which is condemned by God's Word, and by sincerely repenting of and humbly confessing every transgression thereof. Failure at this point will most surely and quickly bring a dark cloud over our assurance, causing the Spirit to withhold His witness. Seventh, by giving all diligence to cultivate the Christian graces, and using all legitimate means to this end. Thus, knowledge of election is cumulative.

The fifth of seven booklets.

