

Sunday Reading.

PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.
How It is Defined and Explained by Rev. Prof. Hunter.

[The following is from a sermon delivered in Leith, Scotland, Evangelical Union Church, on the occasion of the jubilee of the congregation. It is republished in Progress by request.]

That God chooses some and rejects others of our race is declared on the highest authority. Jesus Christ solemnly warns us that "many are called but few chosen." For 1500 years, however, there have been disputes as to whom God chooses and why. No church historian has been able to trace any dispute on this doctrine beyond the times of Augustine, who died 430 A. D. He declared that he "discovered that election was unconditional, and that the Church had hitherto 'kept silence' on the question. A man of great influence, he originated a tradition which has been largely received and faithfully handed down to our day. We acknowledge the antiquity of this tradition. We must, however, confine our enquiries to the New Testament declaration, for our Lord says, "Many are called," thus confining the subject to those to whom "the Word of God has come." We assume that the words "choose" or "elect" are used in their ordinary sense, Paul tells us that he would "rather speak five words so as to teach others, than 5000 in an unknown tongue." We choose our companions, representatives, and leaders, and Jesus Christ chose twelve from among His followers to be apostles. In every case the word points to approbation and preference. Our approbation may extend only to one or a few particulars, but we, on the whole, prefer them to others. So, when God elects, He approves of the persons whom He prefers to others who were "called."

Let us now hear what Paul says, both of called and chosen. Speaking to the Athenians, who were an inquisitive and rather sceptical people, he declares that he and they "are all the offspring of God," the Father of Spirits. Our Lord, too, makes clear as day that the degraded prodigal was as really a son as his respectable brother. When we understand that our Father in heaven prefers some of His family to others, we instinctively conclude that there must be some sufficient reason for the preference. Should any number of men tell us that it is "His mere good pleasure," we dare not accept this as an answer, inasmuch as God challenges us to judge His actions and say whether or not "His ways are equal," and reveal His character as "no respecter of persons," and one "who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." If His word gives no better reason than "mere good pleasure," we must admit that it is impossible to believe He so loved all men as to give His Son to bring them to Himself. We hesitate not, however, to say that the New Testament is entirely opposed to such an answer as to whom God selects and why.

Our text is luminous as to both questions. He hath chosen us. Who are they? Evidently himself and the persons to whom he wrote this letter, who are "saints and faithful in Christ Jesus." Is it not fair for God to prefer saints and faithful to unholiness and faithless? Does not every conscience admit the righteousness of such preference? Will it not stand approved in the judgment when the secrets of all hearts are revealed? Should anyone ask the foundation of this character, our text tells us, "chosen in Him." This is a favourite expression with the apostle. It occurs ten times in the first fourteen verses of this chapter. Our Lord, too, was fond of using it. "In Me ye have peace and light, and joy and strength."

In every instance it represents union with Christ as close as that of the branches to the vine, or the members to the body. This union influences our whole life, as certainly as one in love or in fear is influenced by love or fear.

Our Lord and His apostles teach that He is the centre of all good influences to men, that without Him we can do nothing spiritually acceptable, that he is the one mediator between God and men. So, from among the many to whom the word of God comes, He chooses those who are by faith brought under Christ's influence, and rejects those who reject Him. Is not this fair and equal? These very Ephesians were at one time "without Christ," and so "dead in trespasses and sins," but now "in Christ" they "partook of His fulness" and became "new creatures." Ought not new treatment be given them? If he is to be honored, ought not his members to partake of His honor? Paul knew of no election to life except by union to Christ, and with him agree the rest of the apostles. Hence Peter urges Christians to "make their election sure." How could man make sure what was fixed unconditionally? The idea is absurd. Indeed, so deeply has this been felt that expositors have ventured to represent Peter as saying—Make yourselves sure of your Christ and election! Such a travesty of plain words has seldom been surpassed. But if election depends on union to Christ, then we require to be "diligent" lest we become as withered branches and so be rejected because ceasing to partake of the sap from the true vine. Did not our Lord choose Judas from among His followers and appoint him to the apostolate? Did he not fall from his high estate by transgression? By whatever process, he manifestly lost faith in Jesus as the Messiah of God, and step by step became a traitor. Some have dared to say he was always a traitor at heart. What? Did not He who "knew what was in men" choose him to the highest office, and send him forth to preach the kingdom of God as near, giving him power over devils and to heal the sick in His name? Assuredly he was at one time true to Jesus, and, as he failed, was again and again warned of his danger. These warnings being unheeded, he was at last sorrowfully dismissed as utterly unfit for the duties of an apostle. If an apostle fell, let us beware of the beginnings of evil, in ceasing to live lives of faith in the Son of God. Was not His rejection fair and equal? There can be but one answer, and that seals the rejection of all who neglect so great salvation. But some one may ask if we are not elected before the foundation of the world," when we could not be

united to Christ. Well, could we be persons then? Certainly not. Ah, you say, it is a mysterious subject. Perhaps there may be given us some clue to trace the mystery. It lies in the first two words of the verse, according as. The verse is thus linked on the verse 3. where Paul declares "God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Omit the words "in Christ" and the assertion is untrue. With them it stands gloriously sure. "In Him" the promises are all yea and amen. An earthly bank may fail, but the heavenly promises cannot fail. So even now those "in Christ" have a cheque upon the bank of heaven in a name above suspicion. "All things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Just so in the past time it was fixed that all in Christ should be approved, preferred, and glorified. In other words, Christ is the treasury of all blessings past, present, and future. This is God's purpose, and I ask, Is it not fair and equal? Examine for yourselves, and you will not find one sentence in the New Testament that speaks of Christian election except on the ground of union to Him by faith. If, as a truth-seeker, you ask, Why does God thus act? I venture to suggest a few reasons:

1. As to man, it puts all on a level. Outward distinctions count for nothing. The queen and the beggar stand on the same platform. So with intellectual acquirements: the philosopher and the child are equal. So with spiritual distinctions: the preacher is as dependent as the hearer. All are on a level. The reason of this uniformity is found in the fact that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. "Death is the wages of sin." We have all thus earned for ourselves death. Condemned as guilty of high treason against the King of the Universe, all are alike helpless.

What the dead need is life, and God gives us everlasting life in Christ, and in the living Word tells us of it. "The child says, 'My Father gives me life in Christ.'" The philosopher must say the same. An easier way of getting life is not conceivable. True, it is so simple and easy that many think it unlikely. God's ways differ from ours, but could you devise a plan to suit child and philosopher, especially when both are dead in sin?

If life is not a gift it must be unattainable, and if the gift be not received, the condemnation is increased. The man without the wedding garment was "speechless" because he would not, like the common herd from the streets, receive the garment provided for him. Was it not right to cast out the haughty, self-conceited fool? Again this plan humbles while it elevates. The child is delighted and admires his Saviour; learns to love Him, and thus finds what he needs—Someone to love him and to be loved and served. The philosopher is charmed with the adaptation of the provision to his necessities, and gladly enters the kingdom as a little child. Earth's mighty ones no more boast of their ancestral honors and high station or wealth. They see that as their influence is great so their treason is the more inexcusable. Adoring the long-suffering, beneficent Father who gives them life, they receive it as a child, and henceforth their life shall be dedicated to the Giver. Christ in them gives energy springing from love.

2. As to God. This proves Him "no respecter of persons." All souls are His. He provides at infinite cost for all by giving Christ a ransom for everyone. He gives life freely and proclaims his gift. Yea, sends forth His spirit to press it on the attention of each. We must receive or resist. Thus are solved in Christ all the difficulties that keep men from God. We are apt to fancy that it costs God nothing to give all needed blessings. Behold the value God sets on us in sacrificing Christ for us! Christ, in whom all fulness of the Godhead dwells, is the fullest possible representative of God, and God is resolved to deal with men as they deal with Christ. It manifests also the wisdom of God. God's aim is to bring men as volunteers to work for Him. The dead in sin are utterly unfit for service. They must first live. Hence, when some Jews asked our Lord, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" He replies, "This is the work of God, that ye believe in Him whom He hath sent." "Without faith it is impossible" to serve God, for by faith we live. God gives Christ and life in Him; sends the Word of life; sends His spirit to strive and plead and draw us to hear the God-given Word, and thus by hearing faith comes, and life and love. Never was simplicity more knit to sublimity than by God's easy, artless, unencumbered plan. Thus are we gradually fitted for higher service by receiving more life from Christ. To this source of supply there is no limit. Even here and now we are assured, "If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." If we have such a boon here, what shall the hereafter be? Then His servants serve Him exultingly, gathering strength as the service grows. O the joy of eternally working the works of God, night and day serving Him, and the ability for higher service growing eternally! God elects us to be His servants, and do His work, just as Christ chose twelve apostles, not merely to hear His teaching, but to be thereby fitted for the turning of men to God. Do we elect men to be idle? We soon blame our elect if they do not the work for which they were chosen. God also prefers and blesses those "in Christ," that they may become "holy and without blame before Him in love."

If I have succeeded in showing the complete harmony that exists between God's election and his fatherly love to every one of His human family, you will see that it is indeed a glorious doctrine, and ought to be earnestly pressed on the attention of men, lest they forget the need that exists for "making their calling and election sure." Peter tells us there are some things which, if we neglect we shall "become blind," and shall forget that we are purged from our old sins. "Doing these things," we shall never fall," but "so an entrance will be ministered to us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ." The things referred to are detailed in verses 5-7. We can only touch upon the first and the last, virtue and love, but urge to the study and practice of all. Our word "virtue" is carried over from the Latin, and means manliness, embracing

courage and honesty. Observe, this courage was to be added to faith, and refers to the confession of Christ. This exposed men to many dangers in those early days, which we are not called to face, but even yet we need courage to be peculiar, and lose respectability or friends. Christ says, "Them that confess Me before men, I will confess before My Father who is in heaven; and those who deny Me before men, I will deny before My Father who is in heaven." Confess or deny—there is no neutrality in this war. Is not this fair? "He is a slave who dare not be in the right with two or three." Honesty, too, is needed to form a manly character. A man whose word is his bond, his life open and pure. He may be poor, and utterly unfit to cope in argument with him who can make the worse appear the better cause. He may fall before strong temptations as did Peter, but when he thinks of Christ and his love he will weep bitterly. An honest man is the noblest work God on earth. Believing, let us not fear to confess and honestly follow Christ. Charity or love is the crown of all character, and is more beautifully described in 1 Cor. xiii, than anywhere else. Faith, hope and love are inseparable, but the greatest of these is love, for God Himself is Love.

Many years ago, a sailing ship off the coast of South Africa showed signals of distress. On being communicated with the captain explained that they had passed through a terrible tempest, had lost their reckoning, and were perishing for want of water. From the crew there came a wailing cry, "Water, or we die." Clear and prompt came the reply, "You are in the current of the Amazon; dip and drink." They dipped and drank, and lived to work their ship home. Even so, while men whine and complain, there flows all round us the river of the water of life from the throne of God and the Lamb. "Whoso drinketh of this water shall never thirst." Drink and live and work for God and man, rejoicing ever to sing in your heart, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." "Behold He stands at the door and knocks, if anyone hear His voice and open the door, He will come in to him and sup with him."

Never trouble yourselves about the provision. He who led the thousands brings all fulness with Him, and makes for ever rich. With Him received, you, too, may say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, even as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world that we might become holy and without blame before Him in love." With such a guest nothing is too hard. Will ye hear and live? If not, Why?

HOW IT INTERESTED HIM.

A Practical Way of Proving There is Money in Temperance.

A noted temperance lecturer once visited the shop of a hatter and asked him to give something to "the cause." The shopkeeper coldly replied that he had no interest in it, and then it was that the temperance man began to instruct him, after the Socratic method of question and answer. "I am sorry to hear that," he said, "for it shows me that you are not acquainted with your own business."

"If you are more familiar with my business than I am," said the man, with some spirit, "I shall be happy to take lessons of you."

"Well," said the lecturer, "you deal in hats, and intend to make a little money on every hat you sell?"

"Yes."

"Whatever sends customers to your shop, and increases their ability to buy, promotes your interest, doesn't it?"

"Certainly."

"Whatever makes men content to wear old, worn out hats does your craft an injury?"

"Yes."

"Well sir, if you and I were to walk out along the wharves, and through the streets and lanes of this city, we should see scores of men wearing on their heads old, miserable, slouched hats, which ought years ago to have been thrown into the fire. Now, why don't those men come at once and buy of you?"

"That is not a difficult question to answer," said the shopkeeper. "They are too poor to buy hats."

"That has more influence than liquor in emptying their pockets, and not only that, but injuring their self-respect to such an extent that they are willing to wear old clothes?"

"Nothing," said the man hastily. "Here is some money for your cause. I am beaten!"

Great Cities of Old.
The greatest cities of ancient times were Babylon and Rome. The former is said to have had an area of 100 to 300 square miles; its houses were three or four stories high, but palaces and gardens occupied much of the vast area, so that the population was not what these figures would seem to indicate. In fact, it is said by one historian, that nine-tenths of this area was taken up by gardens and orchards. The total population of the city under Nebuchadnezzar and his son, Evil-Merodach, is estimated at upwards of 2,000,000. Rome reached its greatest size during the fourth century of our era, and its population was then about 2,500,000.

Artificial flowers were invented by pious nuns. In the Italian convents the altars and shrines were, up to the end of the eighteenth century, decorated with artificial flowers, laboriously put together, and made of paper and parchment.

Not Weary of Well Doing.
The Bishop of Chichester, England, Dr. Durnford, who has recently returned from abroad, is now in his ninety-second year, but still hale and vigorous. He visits the parishes in his diocese, and keeps up such work better than many a younger man.

Edward Dunbar, the author of the hymn, "There's a Light in the Window for Thee, Brother," died a few days ago in the jail at Coffeyville, Ky., where he had applied for lodging as a tramp.

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Messages of Help for the Week.

1. "Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation." Mark, XIV, 38.
2. "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." Prov., XIII, 7.
3. "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." Isaiah, LIV, 8.
4. "Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer." Psalm, XIX, 13-14.
5. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Matt. XXIII, 37.
6. "When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they say, seven. And he said unto them how is it that ye do not understand?" Mark, VIII, 19-21.
7. "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Mark, VIII, 36.

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