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Sermon, on the Doctrine of Election, Preached at Arundel

Joseph P. Fessenden

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SERMON,

ON THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION,

PREACHED AT ARUNDEL,

SEPTEMBER 10th, 1820.

BY JOSEPH P. FE SENDEN.

KENNERUN :
PRINTED, BY JAMES K. REMICH.
1820.

PREFACE.

I DEEM it proper to state to the public some of my reasons for consenting to the publication of the following Sermon. A copy of it for the press, was requested by a number of gentlemen, members of the Congregational Society in Arundel, who disbelieve the doctrine of election, or consider, if it be revealed in the Bible, that it ought not to be preached; inasmuch as it is irreconcilable with man's free agency, and beyond the comprehension of any finite capacity. I am credibly informed some have asserted, that the Sermon contains palpable contradictions, and, on this account, they should like to see it in print. Others have said that it inculcates sentiments which are *new*, not found in the writings, either of Watts, Edwards, or Hopkins. I have therefore concluded to give it to the public with all its novelty and contradictions, and leave them to form what opinion concerning it they please.

JOSEPH P. FESSENDEN.

NOTE.

It is with much regret that the insertion of this note is made proper by the authors prefatory remarks, which by their *direct* allusion to "a number of gentlemen, *seem* to point to their conduct with indiscriminate and indefinite animadversion. The *propriety* of such remarks, in prefacing a Sermon, and of their indiscriminate application, is left entirely to the public "to form what opinion concerning it they please," with the following explanation, which, exhibits the *best* foundation upon which these remarks can stand. That they *all* "disbelieve the doctrine of election, or consider, if it be revealed in the Bible, that it ought not to be preached, inasmuch as it is irreconcilable with man's free agency and beyond the comprehension of any finite capacity," they would ask if an *individual* observation, something like this, be a *sufficient* foundation for the *general* application of this remark. Whether this remark be against them or not, it is presumed the propriety of its application requires, *at least*, a *knowledge* of its truth. That "some have asserted, that the Sermon contains palpable contradictions, and on this account, they should like to see it in print:" To this it is correct to say, that by far the *greater* part of their "number" did not hear the Sermon when preached, and had made no such assertion when his preface was written. And upon enquiry no foundation for this remark can be found, except it be in this observation of one or two individuals, viz. that they apprehended the Sermon contained contradictions, and for their own satisfaction they should like to have it printed. Is there not a "palpable" difference in this statement? On requesting the Sermon for the press, it was observed to the author, that by *this* Sermon, it was said, the doctrine of election was *satisfactorily* elucidated and demonstrated, that a number of gentlemen would be glad to avail themselves of the benefit of it, and "on *this* account" they would like to have it printed. Is *this* the motive imputed to them in *his* preface? Or did he forget this information to animadvert on their motives upon *bearsay*? That "others have said it inculcates sentiments which are *new*, not found in the writings, either of Watts, Edwards or Hopkins," the most diligent inquiry to find the authors of this assertion has proved *entirely* unsuccessful. Does this remark then stand *only* upon a fabricated report? To remove the authors fears of having incurred the imputation of "novelty," he may be assured, they know not of *any thing new* attributable to him, unless it be in the *propriety* of his prefatory remarks.

SERMON.

II. Thessalonians, II. Chap. 13th verse.

BUT WE ARE BOUND TO GIVE THANKS ALWAY 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.

THE doctrine of election is very clearly revealed in the holy scriptures, and of great importance in the christian system. But as it makes the salvation of the sinner depend, not on "him that willeth, nor on him that runneth," but on the sovereign grace and good pleasure of God, it is extremely repugnant to the natural heart, and perhaps has been opposed with more virulence and animosity, than any other truth of the bible. And indeed, some apparently sincere and humble christians have found a difficulty, in perceiving the entire consistency of this, with other plainly revealed doctrines of scripture. It is also true, that it has sometimes been so stated, by pious and learned advocates for the doctrines of grace, in their zeal for the sovereignty of God, as to perplex some of their friends, and give their adversaries not a little advantage. It has been common for some, who earnestly contend for the doctrines of grace, to represent the elect, as "chosen to salvation," not merely "through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth," but also chosen, that Christ might die for them, and make atonement for their sins, and *their sins only*. But we consider this view of the subject, not ac-

ording to scripture ; and we believe unanswerable objections may be urged against it. If it be true, that, in the sufferings and death of Christ, an atonement was made for the sins of the elect only, then in this transaction, and in the gospel offer of pardon, no grace has been manifested to the nonelect. In this case, were they to repent and believe on the Saviour, they could not be saved by him. Against this view of the doctrine, therefore, a valid, and, we believe, perfectly unanswerable objection may be raised. We may hence very safely conclude, this is not the proper or scripture view of it. It is readily granted, that, if God had seen fit to exercise his holy sovereignty in this way, it would have been no ground of objection, against his glorious character. If viewing men as sinners, transgressors of his holy and righteous law, he had chosen some to salvation, and sent his Son to make atonement for their sins only, leaving others to perish, without making any provision, in any way for them, he would have done the latter no injustice. He would still have been glorious in holiness. He would have done no more than he had a sovereign and undoubted right to do. But what we contend for, is, that in this case, no grace would have been displayed to the non elect, in the atonement made by Christ, and in the gospel offer of salvation to them through Christ. And that, therefore, this is not the way in which he has exercised his sovereignty, in regard to the redemption and salvation of sinners, because, according to the scriptures, he has done this, in a way perfectly consistent with a *gracious* offer of salvation to the non elect. When

we open the sacred oracles, we there read, that "God so loved the *world*, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life"—that Christ "gave himself a ransom for all"—that, "by the grace of God he should taste death for *every man*"—and that an apostle, writing to christians, says "he is a propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also, for the sins of the *whole world*." We accordingly find the invitations of the gospel extended to all men indiscriminately. "Come unto me all ye that labour, and I will give you rest." "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." And the gracious promise is, "him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." The Bible also plainly informs us, that sinners will not perish, because no atonement is made for them—because no door of mercy is opened for them, but, because they "will not come to Christ, that they may have life." In all this, it is perfectly obvious, that rich grace has been manifested, in the atonement, and gospel offer of salvation, to those, who will finally perish.

Having made these preliminary observations, we will now proceed to the direct discussion of our subject, It will be our object.

1. To make a statement of the doctrine of election.

2. Prove the doctrine. And

3. Answer some of the objections which are urged against it.

1. We are to make a statement of the doctrine of election.

In order to this, a number of particulars must be taken into consideration.

1. It should be remembered that all men are sinners by nature. "They go astray as soon as they are born speaking lies." "The imagination of mans heart is evil from his youth." In consequence of the fall of Adam, sin entered the world, and all his posterity inherit a depraved and corrupt nature, and from their birth, are under the wrath and curse of God.

2. Although such was the undone, and miserable condition of our race, God sent his Son to make atonement for the sins of the world. By his sufferings and death, Christ magnified the holy law and made it honourable; and consecrated a way, whereby God can be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. The atonement is infinitely full; so that every man in the world, if he will repent and believe, may be pardoned and saved.

3. Notwithstanding this full and complete atonement is made, and a gracious offer of pardon and eternal life is freely made to all men, yet, they universally and most ungratefully spurn, and reject it. They all, with one consent, make excuses, and will not come to the Saviour that they might have life. They obstinately persist in their rebellion and enmity, and would all thus continue to do, and miserably perish in their iniquities, unless something more were performed to prevent their ruin.

4. This dreadful consequence God is determined to prevent. He will not suffer all, thus madly to destroy themselves. Accordingly he sends forth his spirit, renews and sanctifies a part of them, and makes them meet for his heavenly kingdom. This number is a definite num-

ber. He knows just how many, and the individual persons, whom he will save.

5. In this, God acts from design. Who are to be saved, and who lost is not with him a matter of indifference. He formed his purpose to renew, sanctify and glorify a part of our sinful race. "This purpose was an eternal purpose—an eternal irrevocable decree."

6. In his eternal purpose to save one part of mankind rather than another part, God is governed by a wise regard to his own good pleasure. He does not save one part rather than another, because one part is, by nature better than another. By nature, the elect are just as bad as the non elect. At the time the purpose was formed to save them, they were not in existence and had done neither good nor evil. As soon as they were born, they became the implacable enemies of God, and such continued, hardening their hearts, rejecting the saviour, till they were regenerated. It could not therefore have been out of a regard to any good thing in them, that they were taken and others left. But in their salvation, God must have been governed by a wise regard to his own good pleasure.

This we believe to be what the scriptures mean by the doctrine of election. In the order of divine purposes, it stands as follows, God determined to create men. Foreseeing that they would fall into sin, he determined to give his Son, as a propitiation of the sins of the whole world; and that through him, the offer of salvation should be made to all indiscriminately; only on condition of repentance and faith. And, foreseeing that this gracious offer would be, universally,

and most ungratefully, rejected, he determined to "have mercy on whom he would have mercy," and accordingly "chose a part of the human race to salvation, through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth."

Having thus stated the doctrine, we proceed

2. To prove it.

1. The doctrine of election may be conclusively proved from the divine foreknowledge.

It is evident from the mere light of nature, that God knows *all* things past, present, and to come. It is impossible that a being of infinite wisdom should commence a system of operations, and not know what he was going to do. If the deity does not know all events, before they take place, then he may increase in knowledge, and be wiser to day, than he was yesterday—If God does not certainly foreknow all things, then he may not only, from time to time, discover things that are new; but misjudge in his arrangements, and be defeated in his purposes. But the Bible puts this matter at rest. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." It is then a settled point, that he must have known from eternity, every event that would take place. God therefore knows who will be saved. From eternity, he viewed the whole race of man, from the fall of Adam to the general judgement, and knew the precise number, that would at last enter into, his kingdom. He knew exactly how many of the human family would be received into heaven; and he knew this with *absolute certainty*. We say he knew with certainty; for there is nothing else that deserves the name of knowledge, but what is certain. God

did not know, how many and who would *probably* be saved, but how many and who would *certainly* be saved. Absolutely to foreknow a mere contingency is impossible. To know who might be saved, and who might not be saved, is to know nothing about it. Certainly to know that a thing will be, and certainly to know that it may not be, is the same thing, as certainly to know, and not certainly to know, at the same time, which is palpable absurdity. It must therefore be conceded, that God certainly knew the precise number of those, who would be saved. But how could this certainly be known, unless it were a determined event? If it were not determined, it was not certain. And if it were not certain, it could not be known. Let any one look at this, with an unprejudiced mind, and we believe he must say, the doctrine of election is true. How could God know from eternity how many would be saved, unless he determined to save precisely that number? In eternity there was no being in existence but God. He was alone and when he existed alone, he certainly knew just how many persons would exist, and how many would be saved. But from whom did he obtain this knowledge? Not from any other being, for there was no other. And not from himself, unless he had determined to save them. For if he had not determined to save them, he could not have known, that they would be saved. It is just as certain therefore, that God determined from eternity, who would be saved, as that he knew from eternity who would be saved.

But let us leave reasoning of this kind, and

turn to the bible. Let us see what the scriptures say in relation to this subject. Is not the doctrine of election revealed in them? If it be not, we will abandon it. But if it is, let us beware and not reject it, lest we fight against God and destroy our souls! First, then, let us look at our text. Does it not fully and clearly contain the doctrine in question? "But 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." If we examine this, in connexion with the verse immediately following: which reads thus. "Whereunto he called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ," we perceive the apostle intimates that, at this time, strong delusions, of which he had been speaking, in the preceding part of the chapter, were sent to those, who "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." He was therefore bound to give continual thanks to God, for his Thessalonian brethren, because it was obvious, from their christian deportment, that they were especially beloved of the Lord; having been, from the *beginning*, chosen to salvation. Some suppose, by the *beginning*, the apostle meant, the time when the gospel was first preached to them. But he clearly distinguishes Gods *choice* of them from their calling, and spoke of the latter as the effect of the former. And it should be observed, that, if the calling of the Thessalonian christians was the effect of any preceding choice of them, it comes to the same thing, whether that choice was made the preceding day, or from eternity, except as the former supposition would

utterly destroy the immutability, and perscience of God. Otherwise, if God acted wisely and righteously in choosing them, rather than their companions in iniquity, it was equally wise and righteous to choose them from eternity, as at the very hour preceding their regeneration. God did not choose them to salvation, because he foresaw they would be holy, nor yet with the purpose of leaving them unholy ; but with the design of preparing them for salvation, through the sanctification of the spirit. They were not chosen on account of their previous sanctification, but they were chosen *through* sanctification. The Holy Spirit began the work in them, would carry it on, and complete their renewal to the divine image. They were chosen also through the belief of the truth." The Holy Spirit, after he had quickened them, led them to believe the several truths of Gods word ; especially those relating to the person and redemption of Christ. Who can read this, believe it to be the word of God, and deny the doctrine of election ? Here an inspired apostle expresses his obligation always to give thanks to God for his Thessalonian brethren ; because he had from the beginning, that is from eternity, chosen them to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth. And if this were the way in which these persons received the sanctifying grace of God : must not all, who ever have been, or ever will be saved, in like manner, be made partakers of it ? The doctrine would seem to be here written in characters of light, so that all, who do not wilfully shut their eyes, must perceive it.

In the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephe-

sians, beginning with the third verse we read as follows. "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. Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Here the apostle seems to be in raptures. And what was the occasion of this excitement of feeling, in this holy man of God? Reflecting on the great things, which God had done for him, and by him, especially among the Gentiles, he could not but break out into praises and thanksgivings unto God on that account. He could do no other, than bless the name of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who had given his Son to die for his believing people, called them to repentance and faith, and thus, as it were, at once conferred all spiritual blessings upon them; as united unto Christ and interested in his salvation. And all this resulted from his *choice* of them in Christ, before the foundation of the world from eternity, not because he foresaw they would of themselves be more holy than others of their fallen race: but that they should be made holy, by separation from sin, consecration unto God, and the sanctification of the spirit, in consequence of their election in Christ. Thus he purposed to render them blameless before him in love. For he had predestinated or foreordained them to be adopted as his children, by faith in Christ Jesus; and to be openly admitted to the privileges of

that high relation to himself notwithstanding their original and actual sinfulness. And he had done this according to his sovereign good will and pleasure. Is it possible, my hearers, for language more clearly or fully to convey any truth to our minds, than does this portion of scripture, the doctrine of election?

Again, let us look at the 11th verse of the same chapter. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance; being predestinated, according to the purpose of him, who worketh all things, after the counsel of his own will" Does not this look like the doctrine in question? Again, let us turn to the 8th chapter of Romans—Here we read as follows—"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son; that he might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us who can be against us?" Now what are we to understand by this? The apostle asserts that he knew that all things work together for good to them that love God. And how did he know this? He knew it because it was the eternal purpose of God that they should, and his purpose could not but be accomplished. Let it be observed, that, in this portion of scripture, many of the principal doctrines of grace are expressly stated, and in their proper order—Election—whom he did foreknow he also did *predestinate* to be conformed to the image of his Son. Regeneration—whom he did predestinate them he also *called*. By this calling regeneration is unquestionably meant. Justification—whom he called them he also justified. And the final perfection and happiness of the chosen—whom he justified, them he also glorified. Sanctification is not expressly mentioned in this golden chain: but predestination to be conformed to the image of Christ, effectual calling and final glory, so describe the beginning, the progress and consummation of sanctification, that no omission can, in this respect, be imputed to the apostle. In the language of faith and hope, he speaks of the work as already done: because insured by the purposes, and promises of God. Again, in 9th chapter of the same Epistle is a remarkable passage, which the opposers of election, with all their efforts, have found it difficult to pervert, or misunderstand. "When Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac, (for the children being not yet born, neither, having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth) it was said unto her the elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated." Is not this the doctrine of election? Even before the children were born, and consequently, before they had done good or evil, it was said to Rebecca, that the elder should serve the younger. This certainly implied the special favour of God to Jacob, above Esau, and that the covenanted blessings would be restricted to him. This

clearly denoted that the purpose of God, in respect of the heirs of promise, would be established according to the sovereign election of God, who calleth men to partake of the blessing as he pleases; and not of any works which they would perform. Again, in the 2d of Timothy 1st chapter and 9th verse is this unequivocal declaration. "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." Now if there be any import in language, these passages of scripture expressly assert personal, unconditional election to holiness, and eternal life. In our proofs of this important doctrine, from the scriptures, we have thus far, confined our attention to the testimony of the apostle. We will now see what the Saviour says upon the subject. We do this, not because the testimony of the apostle is not as infallible, as even that of our blessed Lord himself; for manifestly it is so. The apostle spoke as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. In all that he says, his lips are merely organs used by Jehovah, God is the speaker. His therefore is the testimony of God, and of equal validity with that of the Saviour. But we do it, because some men profess to have a little reverence for the words of Christ; while they entirely disregard the declarations of the inspired apostle. There is then, no doctrine, on which our Lord more strenuously insisted, than that of election. "But ye believe not" said he to the faithless Jews, "because ye are not of my sheep—My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them to me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." What is this but the doctrine of election? Again, "in that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I thank thee O Father Lord of heaven and earth that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so Father for so it seemed good in thy sight." Does not this look like inculcating the doctrine in question, and rejoicing in it? Again, it was a common saying with him. "Many are called but few chosen." He told his disciples "ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you and ordained ye that ye should go and bring forth fruit," Again he says, "all that the Father hath given me shall come to me." In his prayer in the garden he prayed for the elect and for them only. "I pray for them, I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." These declarations are too plain to need a comment, and we believe, do not admit any evasion. Now my hearers what shall we say to these things? Shall we deny the truth of a doctrine, which is revealed with the clearness of a sunbeam in the word of God? Let us not be so carelessly impious.

But we pass lastly to consider some of the objections, which are urged against the doctrine of election. Under this head we must be brief.

It is objected, that, if the doctrine of election be true, then the non elect have nothing to do, and cannot be blamed for not being saved. In answer to this, it may be said, it is their duty immediately to repent and believe on the Saviour. The doctrine of election does not, in the least, infringe upon their freeagency. It leaves them in full possession of all possible liberty to neglect or accept the offers of mercy, made to them in the gospel. And if they will not accept these offers of mercy, are they not to be blamed? We know that it is certain, they will persist in sin and rebellion, and perish, unless God, in mercy, stop them, and unless he has, from eternity, determined to stop them. But are they not in fault for their obstinate perseverance in iniquity? If it be certain, that a man will steal, unless God, from eternity, has determined to prevent it: is that man therefore not to blame for his conduct? Our Saviour was "delivered by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God." But did not the Jews "by wicked hands" crucify and slay him? Joseph was sent into Egypt according to the decree of God. But did not his brethren act wickedly in selling him to a company of Ichmaelites? It seems they thought they did. "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." Again, it is objected that if the doctrine of election be true, God is not sincere in his offers of mercy. It is incompatible with the invitations of the gospel to all men, that God should have determined to make only a part accept of them. To this we answer; there is no doubt, but that the calls and invitations of the gospel are made to all men: and that the offers of mercy are extended, with equal sincerity to each individual. Is this therefore incompatible with the eternal purpose of God, to make only a part accept of his gracious overtures of pardon? Not so—Let us see what the scriptures say, on this subject. "Come for all things are now ready." "There is bread enough and to spare" "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." This shows that abundant provision is made, for the salvation of all men; and that all are invited to partake of it. God is also willing that his offers of grace should be accepted. He is willing, every man should come, and is sincere in his invitations. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways and live?" "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves and live ye." And yet we have proved, that God from eternity, determined to make only a part of mankind accept of his offers of mercy. Again, it is objected, that the doctrine of election represents God as unjust. What justice is there, when all men are equally bad, by nature, to renew, and sanctify and glorify a part, and leave the rest to go on in sin, and perish; To this we answer. In doing this, to whom is God unjust; It will not be pretended that he is unjust to the elect. And is he so to the non elect? Does he inflict upon them a greater

punishment than they deserve? Do not they, who trample on his authority, despise his offers of mercy, and spurn the blood of a Saviour, deserve, to experience the hottest flames of the divine vengeance? But perhaps it is wicked to answer such a blasphemous objection. Let such as urge it, hear what the apostle says on the subject. "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." Again, it is objected that the doctrine of election represents God as *partial* in the distribution of his mercy: and the scriptures affirm that there is no respect of persons with him. In answer to this, we observe that God bestows more grace on the elect, than on the non elect, is certain. But because God is thus discriminating, in granting his favors, he is not partial—Partiality is a *capricious* preference of one person before another. If it could be shown that God in giving more grace to some, than to others, acts from *caprice*, he could not be exonerated from the charge of criminal partiality. Partiality is a disposition to favour one more than another without reason. And if it could be proved, that God has no reason, for the eternal difference, which he makes between the elect and non elect, he would be partial. God is not partial, because his sovereignty is neither arbitrary nor capricious: but, in all its diversified operations, under the guidance of infinite wisdom and goodness. When we see him regard the alms and prayers of the devout Cornelius, with equal complacency, as if he had been a Jew, we are constrained to adopt the sentiment of Peter. "Of a truth I perceive God is no respecter of persons, but, in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

But after all, says the objector, it is not profitable to preach this doctrine. Men cannot comprehend it and it invariably, when mentioned in the desk, produces much excitement and angry feeling. We will beg leave to refer those, who urge this objection, to the following unequivocal declaration—All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is *profitable* for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Mark! my hearers. It does not say all scripture *except* the doctrine of election. But *all* scripture is profitable. Now we would ask, whose opinion is to be most regarded in this matter, that of man, or that of the Holy Ghost?

We might mention many other objections. But it will not be worth while to follow the objector through all the windings of his ever varied expedients to overturn divine truth. We consider if the Bible be true, the doctrine of election is demonstrated, and that is sufficient.

FINIS.