

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD  
IN SALVATION

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*“O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out”*  
Romans 11:33.

“Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9); but the Lord does not save all. Why not? He *does* save some; then *if* He saves some, why not others? Is it because they are too sinful and depraved? No; for the apostle wrote, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; *of whom I am chief*” (1 Tim. 1:15). Therefore, if God saved the “chief” of sinners, none are excluded because of their depravity. Why then does not God save all? Is it because some are too stony-hearted to be won? No; because of the most stony-hearted people of all it is written, that God will yet “take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19). Then is it because some are so stubborn, so intractable, so defiant that God is *unable* to woo them to Himself? Before we answer this question let us ask another; let us appeal to the experience of the Christian reader.

Friend; was there not a time when *you* walked in the counsel of the ungodly, stood in the way of sinners, sat in the seat of the scorers, and with them said, “*We will not* have this Man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14)? Was there not a time when *you* “would not come to Christ that you might have life” (John 5:40)? Yea, was there not a time when you mingled *your* voice with those who said unto God, “Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?” (Job 21:14, 15)? With shamed face you have to acknowledge *there was*. But how is it that all is now changed? What was it that brought you from haughty self-sufficiency to a humble suppliant, from one that was at enmity with God to one that is at peace with Him, from lawlessness to subjection, from hate to love? And, as one ‘born of the Spirit,’ you will readily reply, “*By the grace of God I am what I am*” (1 Cor. 15:10). Then do you not see that it is due to no lack of power in God, nor to His refusal to coerce man, that *other rebels* are not saved too? If God was able to subdue *your* will and win *your* heart, and that *without* interfering with your moral responsibility, then is He not able to do the same for others?

Assuredly He is. Then how inconsistent, how illogical, how foolish of you, in seeking *to account for* the present course of the wicked and their ultimate fate, to argue that God is *unable* to save them, *that they will not let Him*. Do you say, “But the time came when *I was willing*, willing to receive Christ as my Saviour”? True, but it was *the Lord* who *made* you willing (Ps. 110:3; Phil. 2:13) why then does He not make *all* sinners willing? Why, but for the fact that He is sovereign and does as He pleases! But to return to our opening inquiry.

Why is it that all are not saved, particularly all who hear the Gospel? Do you still answer, Because the majority refuse to believe? Well, that is true, but it is only a part of the truth. It is the truth *from the human side*. But there is a Divine side too, and this side of the truth needs to be stressed or God will be robbed of His glory. The unsaved are lost because they refuse to believe; the others are saved because they believe. But *why* do these others believe? What is it that causes them to put their trust in Christ? Is it because they are more intelligent than their fellows, and quicker to discern their *need* of salvation? Perish the thought — “Who *maketh thee to differ from another?* And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7). It is God Himself who maketh the difference between the elect and the non-elect, for of His own it is written, “And we know that the Son of God is come, *and hath given us an understanding*, that we may know Him that is true” (1 John 5:20).

Faith is God’s *gift*, and “all men have not faith” (2 Thess. 3:2); therefore, we see that God does not bestow this gift upon all. Upon whom then does He bestow this saving favor? And we answer, upon His own elect — “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). Hence it is that we read of “the faith of God’s elect” (Titus 1:1). But is God partial in the distribution of His favors? *Has He not the right to be?* Are there still some who ‘murmur against the Good-Man of the house’? Then His own words are sufficient reply — “Is it not lawful for Me *to do what I will with Mine own?*” (Matt. 20:15). God is sovereign in the bestowment of His gifts, both in the natural and in the spiritual realms. So much then for a general statement, and now to particularize.

### **1. The Sovereignty of God the Father in Salvation.**

Perhaps the one Scripture which most emphatically of all asserts the absolute

sovereignty of God in connection with His determining the destiny of His creatures, is the ninth of Romans. We shall not attempt to review here the entire chapter, but will confine ourselves to verses 21-23 — “Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory?” These verses represent fallen mankind as inert and as impotent as a lump of lifeless clay. This Scripture evidences that there is “no difference,” in themselves, between the elect and the non-elect: they are clay of “the same lump,” which agrees with Ephesians 2:3, where we are told, that all are *by nature* “children of wrath.” It teaches us that the ultimate destiny of every individual is decided by the will of God, and blessed it is that such be the case; if it were left to *our* wills, the ultimate destination of us all would be the Lake of Fire. It declares that God Himself *does* make a difference in the respective destinations to which He assigns His creatures, for one vessel is made “*unto* honor and another *unto* dishonor;” some are “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction,” others are “vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory.”

We readily acknowledge that it is very humbling to the proud heart of the creature to behold all mankind in the hand of God as the clay is in the potter’s hand, yet this is precisely how the Scriptures of Truth represent the case. In this day of human boasting, intellectual pride, and deification of man, it needs to be insisted upon that the potter forms his vessels for himself. Let man strive with his Maker as he will, the fact remains that he is nothing more than clay in the Heavenly Potter’s hands, and while we know that God will deal justly with His creatures, that the Judge of all the earth *will do right*, nevertheless, He shapes His vessels for His own purpose and according to His own pleasure. God claims the indisputable right to do as He wills with His own.

Not only has God the right to do as He wills with the creatures of His own hands, but *He exercises this right*, and nowhere is that seen more plainly than in His predestinating grace. Before the foundation of the world God made a choice, a selection, an election. Before His omniscient eye stood the whole of Adam’s race, and from it He singled out a people and predestinated them

“unto the adoption of children,” predestinated them “to be conformed to the image of His Son,” “ordained” them unto eternal life. Many are the Scriptures which set forth this blessed truth, seven of which will now engage our attention.

“As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed” (Acts 13:48). Every artifice of human ingenuity has been employed to blunt the sharp edge of this Scripture and to explain away the obvious meaning of these words, but it has been employed in vain, though nothing will ever be able to reconcile this and similar passages to the mind of the natural man. “As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.”

Here we learn four things:

**First**, that believing is the consequence *and not the cause* of God’s decree.

**Second**, that a limited number only are “ordained to eternal life,” for if all men without exception were thus ordained by God, then the words “as many as are a meaningless qualification.

**Third**, that this “ordination” of God is not to mere external privileges but to “eternal life,” not to service but to salvation itself.

**Fourth**, that all — “as many as,” not one less — who are thus ordained by God to eternal life will most certainly believe.

The comments of the beloved Spurgeon on the above passage are well worthy of our notice. Said he,

“Attempts have been made to prove that these words do not teach predestination, but these attempts so clearly do violence to language that I shall not waste time in answering them. I read: ‘As many as were ordained to eternal life believed’, and I shall not twist the text but shall glorify the grace of God by ascribing to that grace the faith of every man. Is it not God who gives the disposition to believe? If men are disposed to have eternal life, does not He — in every case — dispose them? Is it wrong for God to give grace? If it be right for Him to give it, is it wrong for Him to *purpose* to give it? Would you have Him give it by accident? If it is right for Him to purpose to give grace today, it was right for Him to purpose it before today — and, since He changes not — from eternity.”

“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant *according to the election of grace*. And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:5, 6). The words “Even so” at the beginning of this quotation refer us to the previous verse where we are told, “I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” Note particularly the word “reserved.” In the days of Elijah there were seven thousand — a small minority — who were Divinely preserved from idolatry and brought to the knowledge of the true God. This preservation and illumination was not from anything in themselves, but solely by God’s special influence and agency. How highly favored such individuals were to be thus “reserved” by God! Now says the apostle, Just as there was a “remnant” in Elijah’s days “reserved by God”, even so there is in this present dispensation.

“A remnant according to the election of grace.” Here the *cause* of election is traced back to its source. The basis upon which God elected this “remnant” was not faith foreseen in them, because a choice founded upon the foresight of good works is just as truly made on the ground of *works* as any choice can be, and in such a case, it would not be “*of grace*;” for, says the apostle, “if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace;” which means that grace and works are opposites, they have nothing in common, and will no more mingle than will oil and water. Thus the idea of inherent good foreseen in those chosen, or of anything meritorious performed by them, is rigidly excluded. “A remnant according to the election *of grace*,” signifies an unconditional choice resulting from the sovereign favor of God; in a word, it is absolutely a *gratuitous* election.

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty: and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:26-29). Three times over in this passage reference is made to *God’s choice*, and choice necessarily supposes a selection, the taking of some and the leaving of others. The Choser here is God Himself, as said the Lord Jesus to the apostles, “Ye have not chosen Me,

but I have chosen you” (John 15:16). The number chosen is strictly defined — “not *many* wise men after the flesh, *not many* noble,” etc., which agrees with Matthew 20:16, “So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, *but few chosen.*” So much then for *the fact* of God’s choice; now mark the *objects* of His choice.

The ones spoken of above as chosen of God are “the weak things of the world, base things of the world, and things which are despised.” But why? To demonstrate and magnify His grace. God’s *ways* as well as His thoughts are utterly at variance with man’s. The carnal mind would have supposed that a selection had been made from the ranks of the opulent and influential, the amiable and cultured, so that Christianity might have won the approval and applause of the world by its pageantry and fleshly glory. Ah! but “that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). God chooses the “*base* things.” He did so in Old Testament times. The nation which He singled out to be the depository of His holy oracles and the channel through which the promised Seed should come, was not the ancient Egyptians, the imposing Babylonians, nor the highly civilized and cultured Greeks. No; that people upon whom Jehovah set His love and regarded as ‘the apple of His eye’, were the despised, nomadic Hebrews. So it was when our Lord tabernacled among men. The ones whom He took into favored intimacy with Himself and commissioned to go forth as His ambassadors, were, for the most part, unlettered fishermen. And so it has been ever since. So it is today: at the present rates of increase, it will not be long before it is manifested that the Lord has more in despised China who are really His, than He has in the highly favored U. S. A.; more among the uncivilized blacks of Africa, than He has in cultured (?) Germany! And the purpose of God’s choice, the *raison d’etre* of the selection He has made is, “that no flesh should glory in His presence” — there being nothing whatever in the objects of His choice which should entitle them to His special favors, then, all the praise will be freely ascribed to the exceeding riches of His manifold grace.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies 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 . . . . 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” (Eph. 1:3-5, 11). Here again we are told at what point in time — if time it could be called — when God made choice of those who were to be His children by Jesus Christ. It was not after Adam had fallen and plunged his race into sin and wretchedness, but long ere Adam saw the light, even before the world itself was founded, that God chose us in Christ. Here also we learn the *purpose* which God had before Him in connection with His own elect: it was that they “should be holy and without blame before Him;” it was “unto the adoption of children;” it was that they should “obtain an inheritance.” Here also we discover the *motive* which prompted Him. It was “*in love* that He predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself” — a statement which refutes the oft made and wicked charge that, for God to decide the eternal destiny of His creatures before they are born, is tyrannical and unjust. Finally, we are informed here, that in this matter He took counsel with none, but that we are “predestinated according to the good pleasure of His will.”

“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” (2 Thess. 2:13). There are three things here which deserve special attention. First, the fact that we are expressly told that God’s elect are “chosen to salvation.” Language could not be more explicit. How summarily do these words dispose of the sophistries and equivocations of all who would make election refer to nothing but external privileges or rank in service! It is to “salvation” itself that God hath chosen us. Second, we are warned here that election unto salvation does not disregard the use of appropriate means: salvation is reached through “sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” It is not true that because God has chosen a certain one to salvation that he will be saved willy-nilly, whether he believes or not: nowhere do the Scriptures so represent it. The same God who predestined the end, also appointed the means; the same God who “chose unto salvation”, decreed that His purpose should be realized through the work of the Spirit and belief of the truth. Third, that God has chosen us unto salvation is a profound cause for fervent praise. Note how strongly the apostle expresses *this* — “*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,” etc. Instead of shrinking back in horror from the doctrine of predestination, the believer, when he sees this blessed truth as it is unfolded in the Word, discovers a ground for gratitude and thanksgiving such as nothing else affords, save the unspeakable gift of the Redeemer Himself.

“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” (2 Tim. 1:9). How plain and pointed is the language of Holy Writ! It is man who, by his words, darkeneth counsel. It is impossible to state the case more clearly, or strongly, than it is stated here. Our salvation is not “according to *our* works;” that is to say, it is not due to anything in us, nor the rewarding of anything from us; instead, it is the result of God’s own “purpose and grace;” and this grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. It is by *grace* we are saved, and in the purpose of God this grace was bestowed upon us not only before we saw the light, not only before Adam’s fall, but even before that far distant “beginning” of Genesis 1:1. And herein lies the unassailable comfort of God’s people. If His choice has been from eternity it will last to eternity! “Nothing can survive to eternity but what came from eternity, and what *has* so come, will” (G. S. Bishop).

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2). Here again election by the Father precedes the work of the Holy Spirit in, and the obedience of faith by, those who are saved; thus taking it entirely off creature ground, and resting it in the sovereign pleasure of the Almighty. The “foreknowledge of God the Father” does not here refer to His prescience of all things, but signifies that the saints were all eternally present in Christ before the mind of God. God did not “foreknow” that certain ones who heard the Gospel would believe it *apart from the fact that He had “ordained” these certain ones to eternal life*. What God’s prescience saw in all men was, love of sin and hatred of Himself. The “foreknowledge” of God *is based upon His own decrees* as is clear from Acts 2:23 — “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” — note the order here: first God’s “determinate counsel” (His decree), and second His “foreknowledge.” So it is again in Romans 8:28, 29, “For whom He did

foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son,” but the first word here, “*for*,” looks back to the preceding verse and the last clause of it reads, “to them who are the called according to His purpose” — these are the ones whom He did “foreknow and predestinate.” Finally, it needs to be pointed out that when we read in Scripture of God “knowing” certain people, the word is used in the sense of knowing with approbation and love: “But if any man love God, the same is *known* of Him” (1 Cor. 8:3). To the hypocrites Christ will yet say “I never knew you” — He never loved them. “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” signifies, then, chosen by Him as the special objects of His approbation and love.

Summarizing the teaching of these seven passages we learn that, God has “ordained to eternal life” certain ones, and that in consequence of His ordination they, in due time, “believe;” that God’s ordination to salvation of His own elect, is not due to any good thing in them nor to anything meritorious from them, but solely of His “grace;” that God has designedly selected the most *unlikely* objects to be the recipients of His special favors, in order that “no flesh should glory in His presence;” that God chose His people in Christ before the foundation of the world, not because they were so, but in order that they “*should be*, holy and without blame before him”; that having selected certain ones to salvation, He also decreed the means by which His eternal counsel should be made good; that the very “grace” by which we are saved was, in God’s purpose, “given us in Christ Jesus before the world began;” that long before they were actually created, God’s elect stood present before His mind, were “foreknown” by Him, i.e., were the definite objects of His eternal love.

Before turning to the next division of this chapter, a further word concerning the *subjects* of God’s predestinating grace. We go over this ground again because it is at this point that the doctrine of God’s sovereignty in predestining certain ones to salvation is most frequently assaulted. Perverters of this truth invariably seek to find some cause *outside* God’s own will, which *moves* Him to bestow salvation on sinners; something or other is attributed to the creature which entitles him to receive mercy at the hands of the Creator. We return then to the question, *Why* did God choose the ones He did?

What was there in the elect themselves which attracted God’s heart to them?

Was it because of certain virtues they possessed? Because they were generous-hearted, sweet tempered, truth-speaking? In a word, because they were “good,” that God chose them? No; for our Lord said, “There is none good but one, that is God” (Matt. 19:17). Was it because of any good works they had *performed*? No; for it is written, “There is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:12). Was it because they evidenced an earnestness and zeal in inquiring after God? No; for it is written again, “There is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11). Was it because God foresaw they would believe? No; for how can those who are “*dead* in trespasses and sins” believe in Christ? How could God foreknow some men as believers when belief was impossible to them? Scripture declares that we “believe *through grace*” (Acts 18:27). Faith is God’s gift, and apart from this gift none would believe. The *cause* of His choice then lies within Himself and not in the objects of His choice. He chose the ones He did simply because He chose to choose them.

***“Sons we are by God’s election  
Who on Jesus Christ believe,  
By eternal destination,  
Sovereign grace we now receive,  
Lord Thy mercy,  
Doth both grace and glory give!”***

## **2. The Sovereignty of God the Son in Salvation.**

For whom did Christ die? It surely does not need arguing that the Father had an express purpose in giving Him to die, or that God the Son had a definite design before Him in laying down His life — “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). What then was the purpose of the Father and the design of the Son? We answer, Christ died for “God’s elect.”

We are not unmindful of the fact that the *limited design* in the death of Christ has been the subject of much controversy — what great truth revealed in Scripture has not? Nor do we forget that anything which has to do with the person and work of our blessed Lord requires to be handled with the utmost reverence, and that a “Thus saith the Lord” must be given in support of every assertion we make. Our appeal shall be to the Law and to the Testimony.

For whom did Christ die? Who were the ones He intended to redeem by His blood-shedding? Surely the Lord Jesus had some *absolute determination* before Him when He went to the Cross. If He had, then it necessarily follows

that the *extent* of that purpose was *limited*, because an *absolute* determination or purpose *must be effected*. If the absolute determination of Christ included all mankind, then all mankind would most certainly be saved. To escape this inevitable conclusion many have affirmed that there was no such absolute determination before Christ, that in His death a merely *conditional provision* of salvation has been made for all mankind. The refutation of this assertion is found in the *promises* made by the Father to His Son *before* He went to the Cross, yea, before He became incarnate. The Old Testament Scriptures represent the Father as promising the Son a certain *reward* for His sufferings on behalf of sinners. At this stage we shall confine ourselves to one or two statements recorded in the well known fifty-third of Isaiah. There we find God saying, “When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed,” that “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied,” and that God’s righteous Servant “should justify many” (vv. 10 and 11). But here we would pause and ask, How could it be *certain* that Christ *should* “see His seed,” and “see of the travail of His soul and be *satisfied*,” unless the salvation of certain members of the human race had been *Divinely decreed*, and therefore was sure? How could it be *certain* that Christ *should* “justify many,” if no *effectual* provision was made that *any* should receive Him as their Saviour? On the other hand, to insist that the Lord Jesus *did* expressly purpose the salvation of *all mankind*, is to charge Him with that which no intelligent being should be guilty of, namely, to *design* that which by virtue of His omniscience He *knew would never come to pass*. Hence, the only alternative left us is that, so far as the pre-determined purpose of His death is concerned, Christ died for the elect only. Summing up in a sentence, which we trust will be intelligible to every reader, we would say, Christ died not merely to *make possible* the salvation of all mankind, but to *make certain* the salvation of all that the Father had given to Him. Christ died not simply to render sins pardonable, but “to *put away sin* by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). As to *who’s* “sin” (i.e., *guilt*, as in 1 John 1:7, etc.) *has been* “put away,” Scripture leaves us in no doubt—it was that of the elect, the “world” (John 1:29) of God’s people!

**(1.)** The *limited design* in the Atonement follows, necessarily, from the eternal choice of the Father of certain ones unto salvation. The Scriptures inform us that, before the Lord became incarnate He said, “Lo, I come, to do *Thy will* O God” (Heb. 10:7), and after He had become incarnate He declared, “For I

came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 6:38). If then God had from the beginning chosen certain ones to salvation, then, because the will of Christ was in perfect accord with the will of the Father, He would not seek to *enlarge* upon His election. What we have just said is not merely a plausible deduction of our own, but is in strict harmony with the express teaching of the Word. Again and again our Lord referred to those whom the Father had “given” Him, and concerning whom He was particularly exercised. Said He, “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. . . . And this is the Father’s will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John 6:37, 39). And again, “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee; As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life *to as many as Thou hast given Him*. . . . I have manifested Thy name *unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world*: Thine they were, and Thou gayest them Me; and they have kept Thy Word. . . . I pray for them: I pray not for the world, *but for them which Thou hast given Me*; for they are Thine. . . . Father, I will that they also, *whom Thou hast given Me*, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovest Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:1, 2, 6, 9, 24). Before the foundation of the world the Father predestinated a people to be conformed to the image of His Son, and the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus was in order to the carrying out of the Divine purpose.

(2.) The very *nature* of the Atonement evidences that, in its application to sinners, it was *limited* in the *purpose* of God. The Atonement of Christ may be considered from two chief viewpoints — God-ward and man-ward. God-wards, the Cross-work of Christ was a *propitiation*, an appeasing of Divine wrath, a satisfaction rendered to Divine justice and holiness; man-wards, it was a *substitution*, the Innocent taking the place of the guilty, the Just dying for the unjust. But a strict substitution of a Person for persons, and the infliction upon Him of voluntary sufferings, involve the *definite recognition* on the part of the Substitute and of the One He is to propitiate *of the persons for whom He acts*, whose sins He bears, whose legal obligations He discharges. Furthermore, if the Law-giver accepts the satisfaction which is

made by the Substitute then those for whom the Substitute acts, whose place He takes, must necessarily be acquitted. If I am in debt and unable to discharge it and another comes forward and pays my creditor in full and receives a receipt in acknowledgment, then, in the sight of the law, my creditor no longer has any claim upon me. On the Cross the Lord Jesus gave Himself a ransom, and that it was accepted by God was attested by the open grave three days later; the question we would here raise is, *For whom* was this ransom offered? If it was offered for all mankind then the debt incurred by every man has been canceled. If Christ bore in His own body on the tree the sins of all men without exception, then none will perish. If Christ was “made a curse” for all of Adam’s race then none are now “under condemnation.” “Payment God cannot *twice* demand, first at my bleeding Surety’s hand and then again at mine.” But Christ *did not* discharge the debt of all men without exception, for some there are who will be “cast into prison” (cf. 1 Pet. 3:19 where the same Greek word for “prison” occurs), and they shall “by no means come out thence, till they have *paid* the uttermost farthing” (Matt. 5:26), which, of course, will never be. Christ *did not* bear the sins of all mankind, for some there are who “die *in their sins*” (John 8:21), and whose “sin remaineth” (John 9:41). Christ *was not* “made a curse” for all of Adam’s race, for some there are to whom He will yet say, “Depart from Me *ye cursed*” (Matt. 25:41). To say that Christ died for all alike, to say that He became the Substitute and Surety of the whole human race, to say that He suffered on behalf of and in the stead of all mankind, is to say that He “bore the curse for many who are now bearing the curse for themselves; that He suffered punishment for many who are now lifting up their own eyes in Hell, being in torments; that He paid the redemption price for many who shall yet pay in their own eternal anguish ‘the wages of sin, which is death’” (G. S. Bishop). But, on the other hand, to say as Scripture says, that Christ was stricken for the transgressions *of God’s people*, to say that He gave His life *for the sheep*, to say that He gave His life a ransom *for many*, is to say that He made an atonement which fully atones; it is to say He paid a price which actually ransoms; it is to say He was set forth a propitiation which really propitiates; it is to say He is a Saviour who truly saves.

**(3.)** Closely connected with, and confirmatory of what we have said above, is the teaching of Scripture concerning our Lord’s *priesthood*. It is as the great High Priest that Christ now makes intercession. But *for whom* does He

intercede? For the whole human race, or only for His own people? The answer furnished by the New Testament to this question is clear as a sunbeam. Our Saviour has entered into heaven itself “now to appear in the presence of God *for us*” (Heb. 9:24), that is, for those who are “partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1). And again it is written, “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession *for them*” (Heb. 7:25). This is in strict accord with the Old Testament type. After slaying the sacrificial animal, Aaron went into the holy of holies as the representative and on behalf of the people of God: it was the names of *Israel’s* tribes which were engraven on his breastplate, and it was in *their* interests he appeared before God. Agreeable to this are our Lord’s words in John 17:9 — “I pray for them: I pray *not for the world*, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine.” Another Scripture which deserves careful attention in this connection is found in Romans 8. In verse 33 the question is asked, “Who shall lay anything to the charge *of God’s elect*?” and then follows the inspired answer — “It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession *for us*.” Note particularly that the death and intercession of Christ have one and the same objects! As it was in the type so it is with the antitype — expiation and supplication are *co-extensive*. If then Christ intercedes for the elect only, and “not for the world,” then He died for them only. And observe further, that the death, resurrection, exaltation and intercession of the Lord Jesus, are here assigned as the reason why none can lay any “charge” against God’s *elect*. Let those who would still take issue with what we are advancing weigh carefully the following question — If the death of Christ extends equally to all, how does it become *security* against a “charge,” seeing that all who believe not are “under condemnation”? (John 3:18).

(4.) The number of those who share the benefits of Christ’s death is determined not only by the *nature* of the Atonement and the *priesthood* of Christ but also by His *power*. Grant that the One who died upon the cross was God manifest in the flesh, and it follows inevitably that what Christ has purposed that will He perform; that what He has purchased that will He possess; that what He has set His heart upon that will He secure. If the Lord Jesus possesses all power in heaven and earth, then none can successfully

resist His will. But it may be said, This is true in the abstract, nevertheless, Christ refuses to exercise this power, inasmuch as He will never *force* anyone to receive Him as their Saviour. In one sense that is true, but in another sense it is positively untrue. The salvation of any sinner *is* a matter of Divine power. By nature the sinner is at enmity with God, and naught but Divine power operating within him, can *overcome* this enmity; hence it is written, “No man can come unto Me, *except* the Father which hath sent Me *draw* him” (John 6:44). It is the Divine power overcoming the sinner’s innate enmity which makes him *willing to come* to Christ that he might have life. But this “enmity” is not overcome in all — why? Is it because the enmity is *too strong* to be overcome? Are there some hearts so steeled against Him that Christ is *unable* to gain entrance? To answer in the affirmative is to *deny His omnipotence*. In the final analysis it is not a question of the sinner’s willingness or unwillingness, for by nature *all* are *unwilling*. Willingness to come to Christ is the finished product of Divine power operating in the human heart and will in overcoming man’s inherent and chronic “enmity,” as it is written, “Thy people shall be willing in the day *of Thy power*” (Ps. 110:3). To say that Christ is *unable* to win to Himself those who are unwilling is to deny that all power in heaven and earth is His. To say that Christ cannot put forth His power without destroying man’s responsibility is a begging of the question here raised, for *He has* put forth His power and made willing those who *have* come to Him, and if He did this without destroying *their* responsibility, why “cannot” He do so with others? If He is able to win the heart of one sinner to Himself, why not that of another? To say, as is usually said, the others *will not let Him* is to impeach His sufficiency. It is a question of *His* will. If the Lord Jesus has decreed, desired, purposed the salvation of all mankind, then the entire human race *will be saved*, or, otherwise, He lacks the power to make good His intentions; and in such a case it could never be said, “He *shall* see of the travail of His soul and be *satisfied*.” The issue raised involves *the deity* of the Saviour, for a *defeated* Saviour cannot be God.

Having reviewed some of the general principles which require us to believe that the death of Christ was *limited* in its design, we turn now to consider some of the explicit statements of Scripture which expressly affirm it. In that wondrous and matchless fifty-third of Isaiah God tells us concerning His Son, “He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His

generation? For He was cut off out of the land of the living: *for the transgression of My people was He stricken*”(v. 8). In perfect harmony with this was the word of the angel to Joseph, “Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save *His people* from their sins” (Matt. 1:21) i.e. Not merely Israel, but all whom the Father had “given” Him. Our Lord Himself declared, “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom *for many*”(Matt. 20:28), but why have said “for many” if *all without exception* were included? It was “His people” whom He “redeemed” (Luke 1:68). It was for “the sheep,” and not the “goats”, that the Good Shepherd gave His life (John 10:11). It was the “Church of God” which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

If there is one Scripture more than any other upon which we should be willing to rest our case it is John 11:49-52. Here we are told, “And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.” Here we are told that Caiaphas “prophesied *not of himself*,” that is, like those employed by God in Old Testament times (see 2 Pet. 1:21), his prophecy originated not with himself, but he spake as he was moved by the Holy Spirit; thus is the value of his utterance carefully guarded, and the Divine source of this revelation expressly vouched for. Here, too, we are definitely informed that Christ died *for* “that nation,” i.e., Israel, and also for the One Body, His Church, for it is into the Church that the children of God — “scattered” among the nations — are now being “gathered together in one.” And is it not remarkable that the members of the Church are here called “children of God” even before Christ died, and therefore before He commenced to build His Church! The vast majority of them had not then been born, yet were they regarded as “children of God;” children of God because they had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and therefore “predestinated *unto the adoption of children* by Jesus Christ to Himself” (Eph. 1:4, 5). In like manner, Christ said, “Other sheep *I have* (not “shall have”) which are not of this fold” (John 10:16).

If ever the real design of the Cross was uppermost in the heart and speech of

our blessed Saviour it was during the last week of His earthly ministry. What then do the Scriptures which treat of *this* portion of His ministry record in connection with our present inquiry? They say, "When Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, *having loved His own* which were in the world, *He loved them* unto the end" (John 13:1). They tell us how He said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down His life *for His friends*" (John 15:13). They record His word, "*For their sakes* I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (John 17:19); which means, that for the sake of His own, those "given" to Him by the Father, He separated Himself unto the death of the Cross. One may well ask, Why such discrimination of terms if Christ died for all men indiscriminately?

Ere closing this section of the chapter we shall consider briefly a few of those passages which *seem* to teach most strongly an *unlimited* design in the death of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:14 we read, "One died *for all*." But that is not all this Scripture affirms. If the entire verse and passage from which these words are quoted be carefully examined, it will be found that instead of teaching an unlimited atonement, it emphatically argues a limited design in the death of Christ. The whole verse reads, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead." It should be pointed out that in the Greek there is the definite article before the last "all," and that the verb here is in the aorist tense, and therefore should read, "We thus judge: that if One died for all, then they all died." The apostle is here drawing a conclusion as is clear from the words "we thus judge, that if . . . then were." His meaning is, that those for whom the One died are regarded, *judicially*, as having died too. The next verse goes on to say, "And He died for all, *that* they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died *for them*, and rose again." The One not only died but "rose again," and so, too, did the "all" for whom He died, for it is here said they "live." Those for whom a substitute acts are legally regarded as having acted themselves. In the sight of the law the substitute and those whom he represents are one. So it is in the sight of God. Christ was identified *with His people* and His people were identified with Him, hence when He died they died (judicially) and when He rose they rose also. But further we are told in this passage (v. 17), that if any man be in Christ he is a new creation; he has received a new life in fact as well as in the sight of the law,

hence the “all” for whom Christ died are here bidden to live henceforth no more unto themselves, “but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.” In other words, those who belonged to this “all” for whom Christ died, are here exhorted to manifest practically in their daily lives what is true of them judicially: they are to “live unto Christ who died *for them*.” Thus the “One died *for all*” is defined for us. The “all” for which Christ died are the they which “live,” and which are here bidden to live “unto Him.” This passage then teaches three important truths, and the better to show its scope we mention them in their inverse order: certain ones are here bidden to live no more unto themselves but unto Christ; the ones thus admonished are “they which live,” that is live spiritually, hence, the children of God, for they alone of mankind possess spiritual life, all others being *dead* in trespasses and sins; those who *do* thus live are the ones, the “all,” the “them,” for whom Christ died and rose again. This passage therefore teaches that Christ died for *all His people*, the elect, those given to Him by the Father; that as the result of His death (and rising again “*for them*”) they “live” — and the elect are the *only* ones who *do* thus “live;” and this life which is theirs through Christ must be lived “unto Him,” Christ’s *love* must now “constrain” them.

“For there is one God, and one Mediator, between God and men (not “man”, for this would have been a generic term and signified mankind. O the accuracy of Holy Writ!), the Man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself *a ransom for all*, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:5, 6). It is upon the words “who gave Himself a ransom for all” we would now comment. In Scripture the word “all” (as applied to humankind) is used in two senses — absolutely and relatively. In some passages it means *all without exception*; in others it signifies *all without distinction*. As to which of these meanings it bears in any particular passage, must be determined by the context and decided by a comparison of parallel Scriptures. That the word “all” *is* used in a *relative and restricted* sense, and in such case means all without distinction and *not* all without exception, is clear from a number of Scriptures, from which we select two or three as samples. “And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were *all* baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mark 1:5). Does this mean that *every man, woman and child* from “*all* the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem” were baptized of John in Jordan? Surely not. Luke 7:30 distinctly says, “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, *being*

*not baptized of him.*” Then what does “*all* baptized of him” mean? We answer it *does not mean* all without exception, *but* all without distinction, that is, all classes and conditions of men. The same explanation applies to Luke 3:21. Again we read, “And early in the morning He came again into the Temple, and *all the people* came unto Him; and He sat down, and taught them” (John 8:2); are we to understand this expression absolutely or relatively? Does “all the people” mean all without exception or all without distinction, that is, all classes and conditions of people? Manifestly the latter; for the Temple was not able to accommodate *everybody* that was in Jerusalem at this time, namely, the Feast of Tabernacles. Again, we read in Acts 22:15, “For thou (Paul) shalt be His witness *unto all men* of what thou hast seen and heard.” Surely “all men” here does not mean every member of the human race. Now we submit that the words “who gave Himself a ransom *for all*” in 1 Timothy 2:6 mean all without distinction, and *not* all without exception. He gave Himself a ransom for men of all nationalities, of all generations, of all classes; in a word, for all the elect, as we read in Revelation 5:9, “For Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood *out of every* kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” That this is not an *arbitrary* definition of the “all” in our passage is clear from Matthew 20:28 where we read, “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a *ransom for many*”, which limitation would be quite meaningless if He gave Himself a ransom for all without exception. Furthermore, the qualifying words here, “to be testified in due time”, must be taken into consideration. If Christ gave Himself a ransom for the whole human race, in what sense will this be “*testified* in due time”? seeing that multitudes of men will certainly be eternally lost. But if our text means that Christ gave Himself a ransom for God’s elect, for all without distinction, without distinction of nationality, social prestige, moral character, age or sex, then the meaning of these qualifying words is quite intelligible, for in “due time” this *will be* “testified” in the actual and accomplished salvation of *every one of them*.

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should *taste death for every man*” (Heb. 2:9). This passage need not detain us long. A false doctrine has been erected here on a false translation. There is no word whatever in the Greek corresponding to “man” in our English version. In the Greek it is left in the abstract — “He tasted death for

every.” The Revised Version has correctly *omitted* “man” from the text, but has wrongly inserted it in italics. Others suppose the word “thing” should be supplied — “He tasted death for every thing” — but this, too, we deem a mistake. It seems to us that the words which immediately follow explain our text: “*For* it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” It is of “sons” the apostle is here writing, and we suggest an *ellipsis* of “son” — thus: “He tasted death for every”—and supply *son* in italics. Thus instead of teaching the unlimited design of Christ’s death, Hebrews 2:9, 10 is in perfect accord with the other Scriptures we have quoted which set forth the *restricted* purpose in the Atonement: it was for the “sons” and not the human race our Lord “tasted death” (1 John 2:2 will be examined in detail in Appendix 4).

In closing this section of the chapter let us say that the only limitation in the Atonement we have contended for arises from pure *sovereignty*; it is a limitation not of value and virtue, but of *design* and *application*. We turn now to consider —

### **3. The Sovereignty of God the Holy Spirit in Salvation.**

Since the Holy Spirit is one of the three Persons in the blessed Trinity, it necessarily follows that He is in full sympathy with the will and design of the other Persons of the Godhead. The eternal *purpose* of the Father in election, the *limited design* in the death of the Son, and the *restricted scope* of the Holy Spirit’s operations are in perfect accord. If the Father chose certain ones before the foundation of the world and gave them to His Son, and if it was for them that Christ gave Himself a ransom, then the Holy Spirit is not now working to “bring the world to Christ.” The mission of the Holy Spirit *in* the world today is to *apply* the benefits of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. The question which is now to engage us is not the *extent* of the Holy Spirit’s *power* — *on* that point there can be no doubt, it is infinite — but what we shall seek to show is that, His power and operations are *directed* by Divine wisdom and sovereignty.

We have just said that the power and operations of the Holy Spirit are directed by Divine wisdom and indisputable sovereignty. In proof of this assertion we appeal first to our Lord’s words to Nicodemus in John 3:8 — “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but

canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” A comparison is here drawn between the wind and the Spirit. The comparison is a *double* one: first, both are *sovereign in their actions*, and second, both are *mysterious in their operations*. The comparison is pointed out in the word “so.” The first point of analogy is seen in the words “where it listeth” or “pleaseth”; the second is found in the words “canst not tell.” With the second point of analogy we are not now concerned, but upon the first we would comment further.

“The wind bloweth *where it pleaseth . . . so* is every one that is born *of the Spirit*.” The wind is an element which man can neither harness nor hinder. The wind neither consults man’s pleasure nor can it be regulated by his devices. So it is with the Spirit. The wind blows when it pleases, where it pleases, as it pleases. So it is with the Spirit. The wind is regulated by Divine wisdom, yet, so far as man is concerned, it is absolutely *sovereign* in its operations. So it is with the Spirit. Sometimes the wind blows so softly it scarcely rustles a leaf; at other times it blows so loudly that its roar can be heard for miles. So it is in the matter of the new birth; with some the Holy Spirit deals so gently, that His work is imperceptible to human onlookers; with others His action is so powerful, radical, revolutionary, that His operations are patent to many. Sometimes the wind is purely local in its reach, at other times wide-spread in its scope. So it is with the Spirit: today He acts on one or two souls, tomorrow He may, as at Pentecost, “prick in the heart” a whole multitude. But whether He works on few or many, He consults not man. He acts *as He pleases*. The new birth is due to *the sovereign will* of the Spirit.

Each of the three Persons in the blessed Trinity is concerned with our salvation: with the Father it is predestination; with the Son propitiation; with the Spirit regeneration. The Father chose us; the Son died for us; the Spirit quickens us. The Father was concerned *about* us; the Son shed His blood *for* us, the Spirit performs His work *within* us. What the One did was *eternal*, what the Other did was *external*, what the Spirit does is *internal*. It is with the work of the Spirit we are now concerned, with His work in the new birth, and particularly His *sovereign operations* in the new birth. The Father purposed our new birth; the Son has made possible (by His “travail”) the new birth; but it is the Spirit who *effects* the new birth — “Born of the Spirit” (John 3:6).

The new birth is solely the work of God the Spirit and man has no part or lot in it. This from the very nature of the case. Birth altogether excludes the idea of any effort or work on the part of the one who is born. Personally we have no more to do with our spiritual birth than we had with our natural birth. The new birth is a spiritual resurrection, a “passing from death unto life” (John 5:24) and, clearly, resurrection is altogether *outside* of man’s province. No corpse can reanimate itself. Hence it is written, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth *nothing*” (John 6:63). But the Spirit does not “quicken” everybody — why? The usual answer returned to this question is, Because everybody does not trust in Christ. It is supposed that the Holy Spirit quickens only those who believe. But this is to put the cart before the horse. *Faith is not the cause of the new birth*, but the consequence of it. This ought not to need arguing. Faith (in God) is an exotic, something that is not native to the human heart. If faith *were* a natural product of the human heart, the exercise of a principle common to human nature, it would never have been written, “All men have not faith” (2 Thess. 3:2). Faith is a spiritual grace, the fruit of the spiritual nature, and because the unregenerate are spiritually dead — “dead in trespasses and sins” — then it follows that faith from them is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe anything. “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8) — but they *could* if it were possible for the flesh to believe. Compare with this last-quoted Scripture Hebrews 11:6 — “But without faith it is impossible to please Him.” Can God be “pleased” or satisfied with any thing which does not have its origin in Himself?

That the work of the Holy Spirit *precedes* our believing is unequivocally established by 2 Thessalonians 2:13 — “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Note that “sanctification of the Spirit” comes before and makes possible “belief of the truth.” What then is the “sanctification of the Spirit”? We answer, *the new birth*. In Scripture “sanctification” *always* means “separation,” separation from something and unto something or someone. Let us now amplify our assertion that the “sanctification of the Spirit” corresponds to the new birth and points to the positional effect of it.

Here is a servant of God who preaches the Gospel to a congregation in which are an hundred unsaved people. He brings before them the teaching of Scripture concerning their ruined and lost condition; he speaks of God, His

character and righteous demands; he tells of Christ meeting God's demands, and dying the Just for the unjust, and declares that through "this Man" is now preached the forgiveness of sins; he closes by urging the lost to believe what God has said in His Word and receive His Son as their own personal Saviour. The meeting is over; the congregation disperses; ninety-nine of the unsaved have refused to come to Christ that they might have life, and go out into the night having no hope, and without God in the world. But the hundredth heard the Word of life; the Seed sown fell into ground which had been prepared by God; he believed the Good News, and goes home rejoicing that his name is written in heaven. He has been "born again," and just as a newly-born babe in the natural world begins life by clinging instinctively, in its helplessness, to its mother, so this newborn soul has clung to Christ. Just as we read, "The Lord opened" the heart of Lydia "*that* she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14), so in the case supposed above, the Holy Spirit quickened that one before he believed the Gospel message. Here then is the "sanctification of the Spirit:" this one soul who has been born again has, by virtue of his new birth, been *separated* from the other ninety-nine. Those born again are, by the Spirit, *set apart* from those who are *dead* in trespasses and sins.

A beautiful type of the operations of the Holy Spirit *antecedent* to the sinner's "belief of the truth", is found in the first chapter of Genesis. We read in verse 2, "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." The original Hebrew here might be literally rendered thus: "And the earth *had become* a desolate ruin, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." In "the *beginning*" the earth was not created in the condition described in verse 2. Between the first two verses of Genesis 1 some awful catastrophe had occurred [the Gap Theory-ed.] — possibly the fall of Satan — and, as the consequence, the earth had been blasted and blighted, and had become a "desolate ruin", lying beneath a pall of "darkness." Such also is the history of man. Today, man is not in the condition in which he left the hands of his Creator: an awful catastrophe has happened, and now man is a "desolate ruin" and in total "darkness" concerning spiritual things. Next we read in Genesis 1 how God refashioned the ruined earth and created new beings to inhabit it. First we read, "*And the Spirit of God moved upon* the face of the waters." Next we are told, "*And God said*, Let there be light; and there was light." The order is the same in the

new creation: there is first the action of the Spirit, and then the Word of God giving light. *Before* the Word found entrance into the scene of desolation and darkness, bringing with it the light, the Spirit of God “moved.” So it is in the new creation. “The entrance of Thy words giveth light” (Ps. 119:130), but *before* it can enter the darkened human heart the Spirit of God must operate upon it.<sup>[1]</sup>

To return to 2 Thessalonians 2:13: “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.” The *order* of thought here is most important and instructive. First, God’s eternal choice; second, the sanctification of the Spirit; third, belief of the truth. Precisely the same order is found in 1 Peter 1:2 — “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” We take it that the “obedience” here is the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5), which appropriates the virtues of the sprinkled blood of the Lord Jesus. So then *before* the “obedience” (of faith, cf. Heb. 5:9), there is the work of the Spirit setting us apart, and behind that is the election of God the Father. The ones “sanctified of the Spirit” then, are they whom “God hath from the beginning chosen to salvation” (2 Thess. 2:13), those who are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet. 1:2).

But, it may be said, is not the present mission of the Holy Spirit to “convict *the world* of sin”? And we answer, It is not. The *mission* of the Spirit is threefold; to glorify Christ, to vivify the elect, to edify the saints. John 16:8-11 does not describe the “mission” of the Spirit, but sets forth the *significance* of His *presence* here in the world. It treats not of His subjective work in sinners, showing them their need of Christ, by searching their consciences and striking terror to their hearts; what we have there is entirely objective. To illustrate. Suppose I saw a man hanging on the gallows, *of what* would that “convince” me? Why, that he was a murderer. *How* would I thus be convinced? By reading the record of his trial? By hearing a confession from his own lips? No; but by the fact that he *was* hanging there. So the fact that the Holy Spirit is *here* furnishes proof of the world’s guilt, of God’s righteousness, and of the Devil’s judgment.

The Holy Spirit ought not to be here at all. That is a startling statement, but

we make it deliberately. *Christ* is the One who *ought* to be here. He was sent here by the Father, but the world did not want Him, would not have Him, hated Him, and cast Him out. And the presence of the Spirit here instead *evidences its guilt*. The coming of the Spirit was a proof to demonstration of the resurrection, ascension, and glory of the Lord Jesus. His presence on earth reverses the world's verdict, showing that God has set aside the blasphemous judgment in the palace of Israel's high priest and in the hall of the Roman governor. The "reproof" of the Spirit abides, and abides altogether irrespective of the world's reception or rejection of His testimony.

Had our Lord been referring here to the gracious work which the Spirit would perform *in* those who should be brought to feel their need of Him, He had said that the Spirit would convict men of their unrighteousness, their lack of righteousness. But this is not the thought here at all. The descent of the Spirit from heaven establishes *God's* righteousness, Christ's righteousness. The proof of that is, Christ has gone *to the Father*. Had Christ been an Imposter, as the religious world insisted when they cast Him out, the Father had not received Him. The fact that the Father *did* exalt Him to His own right hand, demonstrates that He was innocent of the charges laid against Him; and the proof that the Father *has* received Him, is the presence now of the Holy Spirit on earth, for Christ has *sent* Him from the Father (John 16:7)! The world was unrighteous in casting Him out, the Father righteous in glorifying Him; and this is what the Spirit's presence here establishes.

"Of judgment, because the Prince of this world is judged" (v. 11). This is the logical and inevitable climax. The world is brought in guilty for their rejection of, for their refusal to receive, Christ. Its condemnation is exhibited by the Father's exaltation of the spurned One. Therefore nothing awaits the world, and its Prince, but judgment. The "judgment" of Satan is already established by The Spirit's presence here, for Christ, through death, set at nought him who had the power of death, that is, the Devil (Heb. 2:14). When God's time comes for the Spirit to depart from the earth, then His sentence will be *executed*, both on the world and its Prince. In the light of this unspeakably solemn passage, we need not be surprised to find Christ saying, "The Spirit of truth, whom the world *cannot* receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him". No, the world wants Him not; He condemns the world.

“And when He is come, He will reprove (or, better, “convict” — bring in guilty) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on Me; Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:8-11). Three things, then, the presence of the Holy Spirit on earth demonstrates to the world: first, its sin, because the world refused to believe on Christ; second, God’s righteousness in exalting to His own right hand the One cast out, and now no more seen by the world; third, judgment, because Satan the world’s prince is already judged, though execution of his judgment is yet future. Thus the Holy Spirit’s presence here *displays* things as they really are.

The Holy Spirit is sovereign in His operations and His mission is confined to God’s elect: they are the ones He “comforts,” “seals,” guides into all truth, shews things to come, etc. The work of the Spirit is *necessary* in order to the complete accomplishment of the Father’s eternal purpose. Speaking hypothetically, but reverently, be it said, that if God had done nothing more than given Christ to die for sinners, not a single sinner would ever have been saved. In order for any sinner to see his *need* of a Saviour and be willing *to receive* the Saviour he needs, the work of the Holy Spirit upon and within him were imperatively required. Had God done nothing more than given Christ to die for sinners and then sent forth His servants to proclaim salvation through Christ, leaving sinners entirely to themselves to accept or reject as *they pleased*, then *every* sinner would have *rejected*, because at heart every man hates God and is at enmity with Him. Therefore the work of the Holy Spirit was needed to bring the sinner to Christ, to overcome his innate opposition, and compel him to accept the provision God has made. We say “compel” the sinner, for this is precisely what the Holy Spirit does, has to do, and this leads us to consider at some length, though as briefly as possible, the parable of the “Marriage Supper.”

In Luke 14:16 we read, “A certain man made a great supper, and bade many.” By comparing carefully what follows here with Matthew 22:2-10 several important distinctions will be observed. We take it that these passages are two independent accounts of the same parable, differing in detail according to the distinctive purpose and design of the Holy Spirit in each Gospel. Matthew’s account — in harmony with the Spirit’s presentation there of Christ as the Son of David, the King of the Jews — says, “A certain *king* made a marriage

for his son.” Luke’s account—where the Spirit presents Christ as the Son of Man — says, “A certain *man* made a great supper and bade many.” Matthew 22:3 says, “And sent forth His *servants*;” Luke 14:17 says, “And sent His *servant*.” Now what we wish particularly to call attention to is, that all through Matthew’s account it is “servants,” whereas in Luke it is always “servant.” The class of readers for whom we are writing are those that believe, unreservedly, in the *verbal* inspiration of the Scriptures, and such will readily acknowledge there must be some reason for this change from the plural number in Matthew to the singular number in Luke. We believe the reason is a weighty one and that attention to this variation reveals an important truth. We believe that the “servants” in Matthew, speaking generally, are *all* who go forth preaching the Gospel, but that the “Servant” in Luke 14 is the Holy Spirit Himself. This is not incongruous, or derogatory to the Holy Spirit, for God the Son, in the days of His earthly ministry, was the Servant of Jehovah (Isa. 42:1). It will be observed that in Matthew 22 the “servants” are sent forth to do three things: first, to “*call*” to the wedding (v. 3); second, to “*tell* those which are bidden . . . all things are ready: come unto the marriage” (v. 4); third, to “*bid* to the marriage” (v. 9); and these three are the things which those who minister the Gospel today are now doing. In Luke 14 the Servant is also sent forth to do three things: first, He is “to *say* to them that were bidden, Come: for all things are now ready” (v. 17) ; second, He is to “*bring in* the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind” (v. 21); third, He is to “*compel* them to come in” (v. 23), and the last two of these the Holy Spirit *alone* can do!

In the above Scripture we see that “*the* Servant,” the Holy Spirit, *compels* certain ones to come in to the “supper” and herein is seen His sovereignty, His omnipotency, His Divine sufficiency. The clear implication from this word “compel” is, that those whom the Holy Spirit *does* “bring in” *are not willing* of themselves *to come*. This is exactly what we have sought to show in previous paragraphs. By nature, God’s elect are children of wrath *even as others* (Eph. 2:3), and as such their hearts are at enmity with God. But this “enmity” of theirs is overcome by the Spirit and He “compels” *them* to come in. Is it not clear then that the reason why *others* are left outside, is not only because they are *unwilling* to go in, but also because the Holy Spirit does not “compel” *them* to come in? Is it not manifest that the Holy Spirit is *sovereign* in the exercise of His power, that as the wind “bloweth *where it pleaseth*”, so

the Holy Spirit *operates where He pleases?*

And now to sum up. We have sought to show the perfect consistency of God's ways: that each Person in the Godhead acts in sympathy and harmony with the Others. God the Father elected certain ones to salvation, God the Son died for the elect, and God the Spirit quickens the elect. Well may we sing,

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise Him all creatures here below,  
Praise Him above ye heavenly host,  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

## FOOTNOTE:

[1] The *priority* contended for above is rather in order of nature than of time, just as the effect *must* ever be preceded by the cause. A blind man must have his eyes opened before he can see, and yet there is *no interval* of time between the one and the other. As soon as his eyes are opened, he sees. So a man must be born again *before* he can “see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). *Seeing* the Son is necessary to believing in Him. Unbelief is attributed to spiritual blindness — those who believed not the “report” of the Gospel “saw no beauty” in Christ that they should desire Him. The work of the Spirit in “quicken” the one dead in sins, *precedes* faith in Christ, just as cause ever precedes effect. But no sooner *is* the heart turned toward Christ by the Spirit, than the Saviour is embraced by the sinner.

## Author

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