

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GOD'S LOVE SHAMEFULLY QUESTIONED.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?”—Malachi i. 2.

MAN, by nature, is a lump of ingratitude. He is often ungrateful even to his earthly friend; and he is invariably ungrateful to his best Friend above, until the grace of God has changed his heart. Leave him alone, and though he may be loaded with mercy, yet he will never bless the hand that gives him the favour. Should he even be allowed to survive so long as a hundred years, unless the Holy Spirit shall deal with him, he will not once remember his God in grateful thankfulness; but he will go on, from the beginning to the end of the century, always receiving, but never rendering back to the Lord anything like gratitude. We often say that ingratitude is one of the worst of sins, and we feel it so when it concerns ourselves; but we quite forget that it must be worse toward God than it is toward us; for, after all, whatever we may do for others, we are only like step-fathers to the blessings we bestow, for every good gift comes directly from the great Father of lights, even from God himself. We may be the channels conveying comfort to others, but the blessing itself comes from him. Shameful, then, is it that all good should come from God, and yet that man should be ungrateful to him who is the great source of it all. The charge of ingratitude can be made against us all as we are by nature; it is not merely of some base, mean, grovelling spirits that we are now speaking, but of mankind as a whole, looking at it on a broad scale.

Observe, next, from our text, that the Lord does not like that we should forget his love. He says here, by his servant Malachi, “I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?” And in the prophecy of Isaiah he says, “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” Our ingratitude evidently grieves God's heart,—speaking after the manner of men.

He cannot bear that we should forget his love ; he presses it upon us as a great fact that he has loved us, and he seems astonished that we should in our ingratitude ask the shameful question, "Wherein hast thou loved us?"

I am going to show you, dear friends, that my text has a double bearing ; and, first, we will *view this truth as it relates to the bulk of men*. There are some to whom God has been exceedingly kind, who are not yet converted ; they do not even profess to be his people, yet he has dealt with them in such a way that he might truly say to them, "I have loved you," in the sense in which we read that great gospel text, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." When I have dealt with that point, as God shall help me, we will then *view this truth as it relates to the Lord's people*, and notice that innermost kind of love of which they have tasted. Yet, though God has loved them emphatically, with a very peculiar kind of love, some of them may be in an ill-humour, and so may be saying, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" An earnest word with them may not be out of place, and may do them good.

I. First, then, take the broadest meaning of the text, and VIEW THIS TRUTH AS IT RELATES TO THE BULK OF MEN.

God had a love to the nation of Israel ; yet many in that nation loved him not, but turned from him with ingratitude. Even then, he still had a benevolent affection towards that nation, so that he favoured them above all other people, and gave them the means of grace, and sent to them light while the rest of the world remained in darkness. Still, I am not going to speak just now particularly concerning Israel ; but to show the bearing of my text upon many who are living to-day, whether Jews or Gentiles.

Let us begin by considering *the announcement of the text* : "I have loved you, saith the Lord." There are many who have very specially participated in God's favour in the form of sparing love. They are yet alive ; it is a wonder that they are, for they have passed through a great many accidents. Others have been killed by very small things ; but, dear friends, very great things have not killed you. You have been very sick ; disease has laid you low, several times you have been on the very borders of the grave ; the mould seemed to slip away from beneath your feet, and you were almost entombed. The doctor thought that there was little hope of your recovery, and others thought so, too ; yet here you are, still in the land of the living. You have had perils in rivers, perils on the deep, perhaps perils in battle ; you have passed through all manner of perils, yet you have been kept alive with death so near. God has very graciously and mercifully preserved you ; he has not allowed you to die in your sins. You are getting rather old, too ; I perceive that your hair is pretty thickly sown with grey, from others it has almost gone ; I see a bald head here and there, or else the snows of many winters lie white above your brow. Getting on to seventy, and yet you have not yielded yourself to Christ ; is it so with any whom I am now addressing ? Seventy years of sparing mercy ! Truly, God has favoured you exceedingly. I do not suppose you are so long-

suffering as that with any of your fellow-creatures; there are some with whom God has had great patience who have not much patience of their own. If anybody offends them, it is a word and a blow; and, sometimes, it is a blow first. But here is the Lord provoked to jealousy every day for fifty, sixty, seventy years; and all that while he has held back his hand from smiting. All these seventy years that tree has stood in the orchard, and it has borne no fruit as yet to repay the owner's labour and care; yet has he put back the axe again and again, and said, "Let it alone, let it alone, let it alone this year also." It cannot be always so, you know; but, still, in your case, my unconverted friend, up to the present there has been much sparing love on the Lord's part in permitting you to cumber the ground so long.

That is not all, for there are also many in whom God has exhibited a great amount of restraining love. Read the life of John Newton; in his early days, he went on board ship, dealt in slaves, traded on the African coast, and at length became himself enslaved. He went to great lengths in sin, yet he said that there was always something which seemed to check him, and hold him back; and no doubt he would have perished in his sin if it had not been that God had put that check upon him. There are some who would have drunk themselves to death long ago, but they could not get the drink, for they were too poor to purchase it. What a blessing that was for them! And there is many a man who would have gone to great excess of riot, but he has had a broken leg, or he has had some infirmity so that he could not do as others did; and if he is not now among the blackest of the black, it is because he could not be. How grateful men ought to be when God thus restrains them from sin! Though not yet saved, it is a great thing to have been kept back from atrocious crimes and open sins. In a field, one day, I saw a horse that had a clog on its foot,—a thing I do not admire at all;—so I asked the owner why the horse was so fettered. "Well," he said, "that horse has the bad habit of leaping over the hedges, and if he were free, we could never keep him anywhere; so I would a great deal sooner clog him than lose him." Some of you have, perhaps, had a clog on your lives, and you are likely still to have it, because the Lord does not mean to lose you; he will not let you get away from him. I have seen hogs in the country with great collars round their necks, so that they should not be able to break through the hedge; when they wanted to ramble out of the field, they could not. So, sometimes, a man will, by his very poverty and infirmity, be prevented from going into sin which otherwise he would have committed, and which would have been to his eternal ruin; and it is a clear proof of the love of God that he has thus restrained him.

I have known others who have been kept back by the check which their early training has had upon them. There are some who cannot sin as do others, for a mother's tears are still remembered by them, and a father's holy example tethers them to something like morality. It is true that they go as far as they can; but there is a something which will not let them find that pleasure in sin which others do. They drink of the cup of devils, but it does not taste to them as it tastes to their

companions; the dregs of it are bitter, and they often feel that it will not do for them though it does for others. Surely, the Lord is thus saying to them, "I have loved you in thus restraining you, and holding you back from sin."

But what a great proof of divine affection it is when inviting love is added to sparing love and restraining love! Many of you have been placed where you have heard the gospel faithfully preached. It is one thing to go to a place of worship; but I am sorry to say that it is quite another thing to hear the gospel; for there are places of worship where the newest and strangest thing to the congregation would be a real gospel discourse; but many of you, dear friends, have heard the gospel from your childhood. You know about the Fall, and about the only way of recovery from it. You have heard of the atoning blood, and of the way of salvation by simple faith in Jesus Christ. What a blessing it is even to hear the Word! There are millions of the human race who have never heard the good news; and millions, I fear, will yet die without having even heard the name of Jesus. Even in our own country, and under the semblance of religious teaching, what masses of people we have who never hear the gospel; they hear about forms and ceremonies, and they are deceived by the falsehoods of priestcraft, but the truth as it is in Jesus is an untold tale to them. So, if you have heard the gospel, and heard it often, there has been, in that privilege, a wonderful manifestation of the love of God to you. Yet, more than that, you have had full, free, earnest, honest, loving entreaties to come to Christ, that you may find life in him; and you have been assured, time out of mind, that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," and that "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." I cannot boast of anything I have done for some of my hearers; but this I can say: if I could know how to preach the gospel more plainly than I have done, I would be willing to go to school to learn the art of it. I have preached as best I could; and, oftentimes, when I might have uttered a fine sentence, or used a pretty expression, I have flung it to the winds that I might say something short and sharp that would cut deep into the conscience and the heart. I care not what men think of me; I want them to think well of my Master, and ill of themselves. I want them to escape from sin, and fly to Calvary's cross, and find eternal salvation there; and it is no small privilege and favour from God for them to be honestly dealt with by the Lord's servant, and to be earnestly entreated to fly to Christ for mercy. "I have loved you, saith the Lord." If you want more proofs than these that I have mentioned, they could be given; but there is not time for more just now, as we must pass on to our next point.

After the announcement in the text, "I have loved you, saith the Lord," there is a *sentence of complaint*: "Yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us?" "How has God ever loved me?" asks one. "I have not a coat on my back." But how did you come to be without a coat? You drank yourself into this state, did you not? And you think it would be a token of love from God if he were to let you continue to lead a drunken dissolute life, and yet have all you wanted? Why, would not this great sinful London become a thousand times

worse than it is, if drunkenness did not bring a man to poverty and rags? Would it be any evidence of God's love to men if he allowed them to live in debauchery and drunkenness, and yet still to have all the comforts of this life, and not to come to want? I tell you, among all men, I pity most the young lord who has so much gold and silver that he may squander as he pleases, and indulge himself in every vice, and then begin again in his evil course. What can that man do but go to the devil unless God's grace shall stop him? I talked, some time ago, to a young man who bears a very honoured name. His father was one of the best Christian men I have known, yet the son seemed to take a pride in telling me of all his ways of sin. His father's name was not as sacred to him as it was to me, but a thing to be spat upon; although he could not truthfully find a fault in his father, yet to him he was "a fool." As for the young man, when he went on to tell me his story, everything grieved me till he said that he was greatly serving his country by improving the breed of horses, and that he had taken to racing largely. "Oh!" I said, "I feel rather glad to hear that, for now you will soon get cleaned out. Your money will speedily be gone, and that, I trust, will be the way home for you." I asked him whether he knew why Satan did not drive express trains to hell, and when he said that he did not know, I told him that it was because he had found that race-horses carried men and women there faster than anything else that he could invent; and I added that I hoped that, one of these days, he might get a heavy fall, and so find himself in the hands of that Great Surgeon who would give him a new heart and a right spirit. We would not encourage any man in any sin whatever; but, sometimes, it does happen that the climax of sin becomes the turning-point of the sinner.

It is a great mercy for many of you working-men that, if you go even a little distance in certain sins, you get pulled up. Instead of its being an evidence of harshness on God's part, it is often a token of special favour. I know that I have often had an opportunity of speaking to men very plainly about their sinful state when they have fallen into trouble; and I have seen a little tenderness in them then, and there has been an opportunity of bringing before them the claims of Christ. Suppose, now, the father in the parable, when his son was feeding the swine in the far country, had said, "There is my dear boy in great poverty, he is very hungry; I will send him a hamper of provisions. He has begun to be in want, so I will make him a present of clothes and money just as if he were at home." What would have been the effect of such treatment? Why, the prodigal would have stopped in the far country, and would have died there, away from his father. His hungry belly was the best blessing that he could have had, with the exception of his father's love. "When he came to himself," through his hunger and want, then he said, "I will arise and go to my father." And the miseries of men, though brought on by their own sin, are often God's voice saying to them, "'The way of transgressors is hard.' 'Turn ye, turn ye: why will ye die?' Leave that evil road." You who are living in sin, have only to look at your afflictions; to see at once evidences that God has loved you.

I am also addressing a great many others who ought to see God's love to them in their mercies. You have a wife and children about you; you have a good business, by which you are able to earn your bread even in these days of keen competition; you have good health, and a thousand earthly comforts. O my dear friend, when there is so much poverty and starvation in this great city, should you not be grateful to God? You may well say,—

“Not more than others I deserve,
Yet God has given me more.”

The very least you can do, surely, is to serve him, and obey his gracious message. If looked at aright, our mercies and our miseries are equally proofs of love. And there are some to whom God has given very choice tokens of love. You, dear friend, had a holy father; that was no small blessing. You had a godly mother; that was another great mercy. You have a praying wife: I do not know a more priceless boon than that. There are some whom I know, who cannot get down to hell, though they seem to try to do so, for, whichever way they move, there is somebody or other praying for them; and they are conscious that, at this very moment, they are the subject of some loved one's prayer. Surely, God has an eye of love upon those whom he has encompassed with his own dear servants who day and night are praying for them.

There are others, to whom God has given a very special favour, namely, a tender conscience. When I was a child, if I had done anything wrong, I did not need anybody to tell me of it; I told myself of it, and I have cried myself to sleep many a time with the consciousness that I had done wrong; and when I came to know the Lord, I felt very grateful to him because he had given me a tender conscience. Never tamper with conscience, dear friends, or seek to make it less sensitive. It will soon get two or three skins over it, and become as hard and callous as a farm labourer's horny hand. It is a great mercy to have the conscience so tender that it bleeds at the slightest touch of sin; and I know some of you, who have not yet given your hearts to Christ, who, nevertheless, have a very tender conscience. It is a great help to any man who has it, and you have no need to say, “Wherein hast thou loved me?” You have proof enough of the Lord's favour in the fact of his giving you such sensitiveness to sin; take care that you do not lose it by the abuse of the privilege.

I have thus put before you God's announcement, and God's complaint.

I close this part of my discourse by reminding you of *the suggestion in the text*. Does it not suggest to you, my dear hearer, that you should thank God for all his favours towards you if you have been thus loved? Do not be like the hog, that eats the acorns under the oak, but never lifts up its head to bless the tree that gives it its food. It is better, as John Bunyan tells us, to imitate the little chicken that never sips a drop of water without lifting its head as if to thank God for every drop it drinks. God give to every one of you a thankful heart! Should it not also be natural to you to try to please him? But “without faith it is impossible to please him.” If there were anything you could do for God, would you not do it? “This is the work of God, that ye

believe on him whom he hath sent." Do you not think that, after all his goodness to you, you should trust him? Do trust him; he will never deceive you. Lean upon him; he will not fail you. And then love him; may the Holy Spirit lead you so to do!

II. Now, in the second place, we are to VIEW THIS TRUTH AS IT RELATES TO THE LORD'S PEOPLE, those to whom God can say, emphatically, in the highest, deepest, fullest sense, "I have loved you."

And, first, we will notice *the statement on God's part*: "I have loved you, saith the Lord." Now that I am addressing those who are in Christ, what a fulness there is in my subject! God loved you, my brothers and sisters, long before the world was made. The verse from which our text is taken goes on to speak of Jacob and Esau, and of God's choice of Jacob. So, dear friends, there was an electing love in your case as well as in Jacob's.

"What was there in you that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?"

Yet he did take delight in you even from eternity. Perhaps you are the only converted one in your family, and to you has been fulfilled that ancient promise, "I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." I looked with something of wonder upon a sister who came, this week, to join the church. She could not remember anyone in her family, as far back as she could go, or any relative of any sort, who ever made any profession of religion, or went to any place of worship. She herself was a singular instance of how the grace of God gets at some people; there she was, all by herself, like a brand plucked out of the fire. Some of us have had the same experience; while others of us have the still greater joy of belonging to a family where all or nearly all love the Lord; yet it is equally wonderful to us that God has loved us and our families, and set us apart for himself.

If you begin your meditation there, at the well-head of discriminating grace and electing love, before all worlds, you can go right straight on, and find some covenant mercy ever at your foot; for the Lord who loved his people gave his Son to die for them. Oh, what love was this! "Herein is love." Giving his Son to die for them, he gave his Spirit to live in them. Here is wondrous love again,—that the Spirit should come and call us, and quicken us, and renew us, and sanctify us, and dwell in us, and keep us to this day. If we would speak of the love of God toward his people, where shall we begin, and where shall we leave off? Everything that God does to his people is all love,—sometimes, the love is a little disguised, but the love is always there. If he caresses, it is love. If he chastens, it is love. If he smiles, it is love. If he frowns, it is love; for God is love, and to his people nothing else but love,—infinite, boundless, eternal, immeasurable, inexhaustible, unchangeable, perpetual love. Oh, the Lord has indeed loved his people, and he does love them, and he will love them, and must love them for ever and for ever! Let their hearts be glad in this fact.

Now we must turn to quite another phase of our subject, that is, *evil questioning on our part*: "Yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us?"

God's people sometimes get into a very ugly temper; some who are in the Lord's family are very queer individuals. I would not speak evil of dignities, and every child of God is a priest and a king, and therefore I must mind what I say; but, really, some of them are strange people, at least at times. An old woman told John Newton she was sure that God chose her before she was born, for he never would have chosen her afterwards; and I think there is some truth in that remark as regards others of the chosen family, for they do seem, sometimes, to get into such a queer condition that one does not know what to make of them. I think I have even heard them say to the Lord, by their actions if not in words, "Wherein hast thou loved us?"

This has happened when they have been in very special trial. One of them said, "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning;" as much as to say that God whipped him every morning as soon as he was up, and kept on whipping him all day long; and he also said, "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked, for there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." "Verily," he added, "I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." "Oh!" says somebody, "that was Judas Iscariot who talked like that." No, it was not; it was Asaph, one of the sweet singers of Israel. But he was getting a long way from the right state of mind when he wrote such words as those, and only the grace of God brought him back; and he had to say, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee." That was a wonderful confession for a man of God to have to make. "Oh!" says one, "then he is very much to be condemned." So he is, but mind that you do not have to be condemned for the same sort of thing; for when a man, who once was well-to-do, comes to be very poor, when he is also racked with disease, so that all his nerves are affected, and his spirits sink, he may do what others before him have done. He is not to be justified even then in speaking or thinking hardly of God; it is a great sin and a great wrong under any circumstances, yet it is done, and it is a grievous thing that it should be done; and I pray any child of God who is now doing it to leave off before he is made to smart for it under the Lord's rod. He will not endure such treatment from you; he tells you that he loves you, and he wants you to believe it, and to know that all your trials and troubles are sent in love, and that, in the end, you shall see that all these things have worked together for your good, seeing that you love God, and are the called according to his purpose. I do not know to whom this message specially belongs, but I am certain that there is somebody here who ought to take this truth home to his heart, and cease from being envious of the wicked, and fretting against the ungodly.

Sometimes, this evil questioning happens when a true child of God gets sad and depressed. A man may be very brave and full of joy, and the hand of God may be suddenly laid upon him, and his spirits may sink almost down to despair. At such times, though it ought not to be the case, yet it often happens that the Christian begins to say,

“How can God have loved me? I am so low, so sad, so depressed; it cannot be that he loves me.” Do not talk like that, dear friend; grieve not the Holy Spirit by saying anything of the kind; but turn unto your God, and say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” “It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.” He has made your heaven secure; he has given you Christ; he has given you a new heart and a right spirit; and he says that you shall shortly be with him enthroned above the skies; therefore do not begin to ask, “Wherein hast thou loved me?”

And, lastly, I have known this question come from professors when they have begun to backslide. When they have grown cold in heart, and indifferent in spirit, then they have said, “The Lord does not love us; we have no evidences and tokens that he does.” Do you remember what the prodigal's elder brother said to his father? “Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.” He said, in effect, that he never had any joy; he was just a servant in the house, and nothing more. But if he had had no joy, whose fault was it? What did his father say to him? “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.” If he had liked, he might not only have taken a kid, but a dozen kids, and all the goats and sheep his father had, for they were all his own. If a Christian is not happy, let him blame himself, not his Lord.

“How vast the treasure we possess!
How rich thy bounty, King of grace!
This world is ours, and worlds to come:
Earth is our lodge, and heaven our home.

“All things are ours; the gift of God,
The purchase of a Saviour's blood;
While the good Spirit shows us how
To use and to improve them too.”

So we ought to be glad and to rejoice; and if we do not, it is because we have grown cold, and have wandered away from our Lord. If any of you are saying, “Wherein hast thou loved us?” drop that question at once, and come home to your Father, and let your Father's heart be a fountain of delight to you; for he loves you, and ever will do so.

I should like to stop just now if you will all think over this one thought; it will not trouble you; it is the sweetest thought, and yet it is the simplest that ever can be. Let everyone who believes in Christ try to get the marrow out of this truth,—“*The Lord loves me.*” Not merely that the Lord pities me,—thinks of me,—cares for me,—all that is true; but the Lord *loves* me, *the Lord* loves me, the Lord loves me. Oh, the sweet savour of that word “love”—to be loved of the great heart which sustains the universe! O child of God, you are as much loved of God as if he had not another child to love! You have all his love, as much as if there were none but you for him to love; will you not be glad and rejoice in him? Cease your murmuring, and lift up your soul in song, and bless and praise his holy name from this time forth, and even for evermore! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ROMANS IX.

Paul begins by expressing his great sorrow because the Jews had rejected Christ.

Verses 1—3. *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh :*

They hated Paul intensely ; nothing could surpass the malice of the Jews against the man whom they reckoned to be an apostate from the true faith, because he had become a follower of Christ, the Nazarene. Yet note what is Paul's feeling towards his cruel countrymen ; he is willing, as it were, to put his own salvation in pawn if by doing so the Jews might but be saved. You must not measure these words by any hard grammatical rule, you must understand them as spoken out of the depths of a great loving heart ; and when such a heart as Paul had begins to talk, it speaks not according to the laws of logic, but according to its own immeasurable feelings. There were times when he almost thought that he would himself consent to be accursed, "anathema," cast away, separated from Christ, if thereby he could save the house of Israel, so great was his love towards them. Of course, this could not be ; and no one understood better than Paul did that there is only one Substitute and one Sacrifice for sinners. He only mentioned this wish to show how dearly he loved the Jews, so that on their account he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. Do you, dear friends, feel that same concern about your brethren, your kinsmen according to the flesh ? If they are not saved, do you greatly wonder that they are not, if you have no such concern about them ? But when once your heart is brought to this pitch of agony about their souls, you will soon see them saved.

4, 5. *Who are Israelites ; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises ; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.*

This was what troubled the apostle so much concerning the Jews, that they should have such extraordinary privileges, and yet should be cast away ; most of all, that Jesus Christ, the Saviour of men, should be of their race, bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, and yet they would not receive him, or be saved by him. Oh, the terrible hardness of the human heart ; and what poor things the richest privileges are unless the grace of God goes with them to give us the inner secret of true faith in Christ !

6. *Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect.*

Paul is always jealous lest anyone should suppose that the Word of God has failed, or that the purpose of God has come to nought.

6, 7. *For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel : neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children :*

Now he goes on to show that the blessings of God's grace do not go according to carnal descent. It is true that God promised to bless the seed of Abraham, yet he meant that word "seed" in a very special sense.

7. *But, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.*

By passing over Ishmael, God showed that there was nothing of saving efficacy in blood or birth. Ishmael was the firstborn son of Abraham ; but he was passed by, for the promise was, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

8—10. *That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;—*

When there were twins to be born of her;—

11—13. *(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.*

Here were two children born at the same time; yet Esau was not of the true “seed.” It matters not how closely you may be connected with the people of God, unless you have a new heart and a right spirit yourself, you still do not belong to the covenant seed, for it is not of the flesh that this privilege comes, but God has chosen a spiritual seed according to his own good pleasure.

14. *What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.*

Paul knew very well that there would always be some who would cry out against this doctrine, that men would say that God was partial and unjust. If he had not foreseen that the declaration of this doctrine would provoke such remarks, he would not have put it so: “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.”

15, 16. *For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*

You know that the modern way of meeting objections to Scripture is to give up everything to the infidel, and then say that you have won him; but the true Christian way is to give up nothing at all, and if the truth is objectionable, to make it, if possible, still more objectionable, to turn the very hardest side it has right in front of the face of man, and to say, “This is God’s truth; refuse it at your peril.” I believe that half the attempts to win over unbelievers by toning down truth have simply been to the dishonouring of the truth and the destruction of the doubter, and that it would be always better to do as the apostle here does,—not to disavow the truth, but to proclaim it as fully, and faithfully, and plainly as possible. Let us again read what he here says: “Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

17. *For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh,*

Paul is now going to show the other side of the same truth: “The scripture saith unto Pharaoh,”—

17—19. *Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?*

Paul knew that the doctrine would be objected to on this ground; evidently he intended to assert something which was open to this objection, which would naturally suggest itself to men: “Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?”

20—25. *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering 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, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.*

See the grand style in which God talks to men. He speaks after a royal fashion: "I will." He asks no man's leave for what he will do: "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved."

26. *And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people;—*

Though he himself had said it,—

26. *There shall they be called the children of the living God.*

See the splendour of this divine sovereignty, which shows itself in wondrous, unexpected acts of grace, selecting and taking to itself those who seem to be self-condemned, and even condemned by himself, of whom he had said, "Ye are not my people."

27—31. *Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: for he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha. What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.*

Does it not seem strange that men who were outwardly sinful, who were utterly ignorant of any way of righteousness, and even indifferent to it, have been by the grace of God led to seek righteousness in the right way, namely, by faith in Christ, and they have found it, and God's electing love is seen in them; while others, who seem very sincere and devout as to outward ritual, by following it and it alone, have missed their way, and never found the true righteousness? The sovereignty of God appears in the choosing of those who follow the way of faith, and the casting away of those who follow the way of mere outward righteousness. But why did Israel miss the way?

32, 33. *Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence:*

I say again that there have been great attempts made, with logical dynamite, to blow up this great rock of offence, and to clear away every difficulty from the path of the man who wants to be saved by his own method, and to make everything pleasant all round for him; but against this course of action we bear our continual protest, for it is not according to the mind of God, or the teaching of his Word: "As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence."

33. *And whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.*

But if they believe not on him, they shall one day be ashamed; and, meanwhile, the eternal purpose of God shall still stand. He shall still be glorious whatever men shall do, or shall not do.