

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

“GLORY BE UNTO THE FATHER.”

A Sermon

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“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”—Ephesians i. 3, 4.

LAST Lord's-day I finished the morning services at Exeter Hall with a sermon upon John's choice doxology, “Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” I felt, therefore, that it would be most fitting to open this series of services with another doxology; and as the last was in praise of the Second Person of the divine Unity, this is to the honour and glory of the Adorable Person of the Father. May God, who gave his servants a praiseful spirit so that their epistles abound with doxologies, give the like spirit of joyous thankfulness to us at this time, that we may all say from the very bottom of our hearts, “Amen” to our text, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Of praise, we may say what was said concerning salt in the Scripture, “without prescribing how much.” Oh to praise and pray without ceasing! May the Holy Spirit work in us perpetual thanksgiving!

Observe well, that the same word is used in reference to our wish towards God and God's act towards us:—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us.” It is a very striking thing that our poor pebble-stones of wishes should be valued so much that the same word should be used in reference to them as in reference to the priceless diamonds of grace which the Lord hath bestowed upon us. We bless God because he blesses us. “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

Now, it is easy to understand how the Father of mercies, from whom every good and perfect gift proceeds, really blesses us; but how can we be said to bless him?—and what is the distinction between that and praising him? For there is such a distinction, since we read, “All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord, and thy saints shall bless thee.” Praise rises even from lifeless objects, as they display the power and wisdom of their Creator; but intelligence, will, and intent are needful for blessing God. Praise is the manifestation of our inward reverence and esteem,

it adores and magnifies; but in blessing God we think well of him, and wish well to him, and desire that others may do the same. In blessing God there is the desire to do good to God even as he doth to us, if it were possible for us to do so. We fail in the power wherewith to accomplish such a desire, but it is well that it is in our hearts. God cannot actually receive anything from us for his own enrichment or increase; for all things that we can do for him are his already, and they must be done in his strength, so that when all is done it must be said, "Of thine own have we given thee." Neither can we add to his splendour or his happiness; for he is by nature inconceivably glorious and infinitely blessed: yet if such an increase were within our power, we would gladly render it. If all things were ours, we would lay them at his feet; and such things as we have, though we cannot give them directly to him, yet we give them to his cause, and to the poor of his people. What saith the Psalmist, "O Lord, thou art my God; my goodness extendeth not to thee, but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight." We are happy that, in assisting the needy believer, we are blessing the Lord. There is also a considerable measure of blessing God in such prayers as these: "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." When we gladly ascribe unto the Lord glory, and power, and dominion, we are blessing him. When we wish other men to love and serve the Lord, and do him homage, we are blessing him. When we desire to love him more ourselves, and feel our hearts burn with aspirations after fellowship with him, we are blessing him. When we are zealous to make known the truth of the gospel which glorifies God, and to make known his Son in whom especially he is revealed, we are blessing God. In sacred silence, when the heart cannot translate her emotions into words, and hardly into thoughts, we can bless the Lord. In rendering unto God such things as we can render, and in asking evermore the still larger question, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? we are blessing him. If we cheerfully await his bidding, and count it a delight to stand with girded loins, crying, "What wouldst thou have me to do? Hast thou an errand for these willing feet? Here am I; send me." Then are we in effect blessing our Lord. Can you sing from your soul—

"There's not a lamb among thy flock
I would disdain to feed;
There's not a foe before whose face
I'd fear thy cause to plead?"

Then are you in that state of heart in which all that is within you blesses God's holy name. Blessed be God. We would make him better known, and so increase his manifest glory, wishing all the while that we could do a thousand times more. May our hearts be at this time filled with high ideas of the goodness and greatness of the Lord, and so may our souls be ready to burst forth in praise, eager for service, and bowed in reverent adoration. "Bless the Lord, O house of Israel: bless the Lord, O house of Aaron: bless the Lord, O house of Levi: ye that fear the Lord, bless the Lord. Blessed be the Lord out of Zion, which dwelleth at Jerusalem. Praise ye the Lord."

May we be stirred up to bless the Lord by the teaching of our text.

I. Here we have, first of all, GOD THE FATHER VIEWED ARIGHT. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When the divine Father is viewed aright *he becomes the object of our gratitude*, not of our dread. Instead of trembling before him as before an austere judge, we rejoice in him as a tender Father. He is no more to us the Thunderer of Sinai, but the Father of our spirits. Among the ignorant it is too much the custom to ascribe every mercy to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to think that he is all kindness and gentleness, while the Father is full of stern justice and severity; but it is not so. God is love, and that love dwells equally in each of the sacred Three. Our Lord Jesus Christ comes to us by reason of the love of the Father: “thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.” In every act of the Lord Jesus he reveals the tenderness and grace of the Father to us. He says, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,” and “I say not that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you.” “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.” The love of the Father is in all respects equal to the love of the Son. We must never for a single moment in our minds set one person of the Holy Trinity before another. We must believe in “the love of the Spirit,” and speak of “our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God, even our Father which hath loved us.” Let us never fall into the mistaken idea that the atoning sacrifice of Christ was intended to make an angry God willing to be merciful. Far otherwise is it: Jesus dies not to create mercy in God’s heart, but to open a way for the exercise of the mercy which was there from all eternity. To our apprehension God may seem changed when we realize the great reconciliation, but in very deed he was always full of grace. God’s love went forth towards his chosen before the Saviour died, and because he loved them, therefore he gave his Son to die for them. Let us see in this death of our Redeemer not the cause, but the result of God’s love; and let us magnify the Father who spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Is not the Father from this point of view the object of our love, and praise, and blessing? “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Let us cast out the fear which hath torment; let us no longer stand afar off, but draw nigh unto God with childlike confidence and hearts aglow with ardent love. May the Lord direct our hearts into the love of God.

Next, if we would view the Father aright we must regard him *as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ*. This is a wonderful title. We sing often—

“The God of Abraham praise,”

and truly it is blessed to view God as the God of Abraham, but how much more as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus, after his resurrection, called him “My Father, and your Father: my God, and your God”; and when he was in the act of expiring, he cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” To our Lord Jesus as

man, the Father was God, and he worshipped him and served him. How frequently Jesus drew near to God in prayer! How constantly he rendered obedience to him! Our Lord also says of himself in the twenty-second Psalm—"I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." Thus did our Mediator bow before the throne, and own to the truth then present, "My Father is greater than I." I delight to think that God is now dealing with his people as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ; for what blessings are there which God would not give to the Son of the Highest, that holy thing that was born of Mary? How greatly must God bless him, the perfect man Christ Jesus, of whom it is written in the psalm: "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." God, I say, is dealing with his own chosen as he dealeth with the perfectly obedient One. By the obedience of one many are made righteous, and treated as such; and we among the many are accepted in the Beloved. It is the God of Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and to him Paul prayed for the Ephesians, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." You remember how the tribes of Israel were blessed by the God of Jacob for their father's sake: even so are we blessed by the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to the measure in which he would bless his spotless Son Jesus. Think then of the infinite Jehovah as the God of our Lord Jesus, and therefore the God of his redeemed people.

The text title is "*The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" which may respect the double filiation of Christ. First, as to his Godhead: there is that mysterious sonship which we cannot understand, but which is nevertheless clearly revealed. He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as Jesus is God. And then there is that second sonship which belongs to Christ as man, in which again he is said to be the Son of God. "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman." The Father thrice said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The great work of expiation is over, and "now is the Son of God glorified," and the Father manifests his unbounded love to his Son; let it then be a matter of great joy to us that the Father loves his people even as he loves his Son, and blesses us as he blesses him. Even as Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh because of his love to Joseph, even so the great Father lays his mighty hand in benediction upon all his chosen, and blesses the very least believer as he blesses his Son Jesus. He who hath highly exalted his Son Jesus, to whom he stands in a double sense in the relation of a Father, has also prepared a throne in glory for all who are in Christ.

"The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" How endearing and attractive is the name! If we can view the Father in that light, we shall be able to approach him with firmer confidence, we shall rejoice in him with greater joy. Note that the text contains a possessive pronoun: it saith, not "The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ," but "*of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" who is ours in this particular sense, that he is our federal Head. Just as the first Adam headed up the race, and we stood or fell in him, even so the

second Adam headed up and comprehended within himself all the chosen, and we who can claim that Christ is ours are for that reason able to claim all that belongs to Christ, for our heavenly Bridegroom endows us with all his possessions. “It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Jesus says, “All things that the Father hath are mine,” and the Spirit saith, “All things are yours”; and therefore we may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Believers, are you not one with Christ? Then Christ’s God is your God, Christ’s Father is your Father. “Ye are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones”; for this cause did he leave his Father and cleave unto the church, that he might be one flesh with her. All believers are heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

This is the true view of the Father: he is our Father, our God, our Saviour’s Father, our Saviour’s God. Let us delight ourselves in him, and magnify and bless his name.

II. We come, secondly, to notice THE BLESSING WHICH COMES FROM THE FATHER AS VIEWED BY FAITH. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” *The blessing of God even the Father has fallen from all eternity upon all who are in Christ*, and that in the most copious manner, for the one blessing includes “all spiritual blessings.” This is a very pleasant thing to me, because there can be no blessing like that of God. “I wot,” said one of old, “whom he blesseth is blessed.” Satan may curse you; you may already be suffering the curse of the Fall; but, if God blesses you, what of all this? Let but the Lord say, “I have blessed him,” and who can stay it, or who can reverse it? The blessing of God maketh rich, safe, happy. When he commands the blessing, it is life for evermore. Why, it means an infinite blessing, the blessing of one omnipotent to fulfil his word; omniscient to carry it out in every place; immutable, so that it never can be reversed; eternal, so that it shall stand for ever and ever. The blessing of God! What must it be? As is God, such is his blessing. Who that dives deepest into it can fully comprehend all its meaning? The blessing of God the Father is a true and real blessing: he speaketh not a lie nor a vanity. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he commanded, and shall it not stand fast? The blessing of God! How sure, how effectual! Oh, to receive it! He that hath it, though he be in poverty, he is rich; though he be in sorrow, he is consoled; though in shame, he hath honour; though he lie a-dying, he shall revive; though he were dead, yet shall he live. Such a blessing as this is enough to turn a dungeon into a paradise, a hell into heaven; and if it fall upon the most desponding and despairing, it must make their hearts to dance for joy.

I have already told you *this is the blessing of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*; and I would remind you that it was the custom of fathers to give blessings to their sons. All through the Old Testament we find patriarchs, when about to die, calling their children together, and pronouncing a blessing upon them. I should have liked to have received the blessing of Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob; but what must be the blessing of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as he lays

his hand upon each one of our poor unworthy heads, and says, "Surely, blessing I will bless thee"? Jacob could not bless the beloved Joseph after the fashion in which the Lord blesses his beloved Son and those who are in him.

You could not desire a greater blessing than you have at this day, for the text says, "He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." I would call your attention very particularly to the fact that it is here stated that *God has already given the blessing*. Strictly speaking, I suppose it should be read, "God blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus"; and he continues still to do the same. Do you seek a blessing from God? He has pronounced it already upon you. Do you require anything? You have it: it is given to you in the covenant of grace. Like as when the Lord blessed Abraham he gave him the land of Canaan, so has he given to you all covenant blessings. You have only to ask of the Lord, and he will give you to enjoy each blessing, according as it will be for your good. No good thing will the Lord withhold from you. All you now have to do is by prayer and faith to grasp and enjoy the mercy, for he hath said—"For this good thing will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." "Alas!" says one, "I have some blessings, but need many more." This is your unbelief, for all spiritual blessings are pronounced upon you. Yours are the precious things of heaven, the dew and the deep which coucheth beneath. The chief things of the ancient mountains and the precious things of the everlasting hills are yours, and no part of your inheritance shall be rent away from you. A boundless blessing the eternal Father has pronounced upon you as you are in Christ Jesus: he hath spoken it, and he will make it good. When therefore you are in need, bow the knee, and say, "My Father, thou hast given me this already in Christ, now therefore fulfil this word unto thy servant, whereon thou hast caused me to hope." When Jacob rose up from his father's bedside he knew that Isaac's blessing was upon him, and even so the benediction of the Father is on every believer. Rise up, thou heir of heaven; shake thyself from the dust, for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed thee out of the fulness of his heart, and thou art blessed indeed. *The benediction is as comprehensive as your needs*; if you lack all things, behold all things are here.

Notice, *the apostle here dwells mainly upon all spiritual blessings*: does he therefore exclude temporal mercies? Nay, brethren, the greater secures the less. Doubtless Paul thought the comforts of time and sense to be so secondary compared with spiritual blessings in heavenly places, that he thought it no wrong to omit them or consider them to be included while he lifted up his praise in this verse to the Father for his spiritual gifts: for he that gives us the gold of spiritual blessings will never deny us the silver of temporal blessings. He that gives us heaven will surely give us all that is needful on the road thither. Abraham gave gifts to his sons by Keturah and sent them away, but to Isaac he gave the inheritance, which is described as "all that he had." Spirituals are the best gifts: the heritage given to the firstborn. Delight yourselves in spiritual things, for this will mark the distinction between you and the carnal man who has his portion in this life, whereas the

believer's motto is, “The Lord is my portion.” Look at the worldling. If his barns are full of corn, and his presses bursting with new wine, then he is happy, for he cares not for spiritual things, and his soul's poverty does not trouble him. You and I are of another quality: spirituals are our first demand, and without them we are undone. Our covetousness is for much of the Spirit's gifts and graces—much love, much faith, much holiness, much communion with the Father and the Son, and the temporals we can leave with our heavenly Father, who knows that we have need of all these things. We shall have enough spending money on the road to glory; for he who has guaranteed to bring us there will not starve us by the way. Spiritual blessings are such as concern our spirit, which is our nobler part; they have a fulness about them which can never dwell in the disappointing riches of earth, and they are of a substantial and enduring nature, which widely separates them from the shadows of mere carnal delight. Every mouth may eat of the bread of the body, but truly blessed are they that eat bread in the kingdom of God. Every dog as he runs may drink of Nilus, but to drink of the river of the water of life is another matter. Spiritual blessings are for spiritual men, for they only can appreciate or even perceive them: they are a prepared portion for a prepared people. They range from the first painful sense of sin up to the sinless perfection of eternal glory, and all these blessings are pronounced upon the head of each heir of salvation. Shall we not laud and magnify the Father for this? These are the good and perfect gifts which are from above, and come from the unchanging Father of lights; to him be glory in the church throughout all ages for ever and ever.

These blessings are ours personally, for he hath blessed *us*. It is not upon the clouds that the blessing falls, but upon individuals. “He loved me, and gave himself for me.” The Lord hath said to his people, “Ye are the blessed of the Lord and your offspring with you.” Personal appropriation is the main thing that we need; all else lies ready to our hand. Nothing more could be provided, nothing more need to be desired; but we need faith to take to ourselves the heavenly provision, and for lack of it we go hungering in the midst of plenty. Brethren, there is no need for this. We do not well to sit with the lepers at Samaria's gate when we have but to arouse ourselves and find abundant provision for ourselves and all the King's household.

Furthermore, note well that our heavenly Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings *in heavenly places* in Christ. Spiritual blessings are heavenly things; they come from heaven, they lead to heaven, they are of a heavenly nature, and are such as are enjoyed in heaven itself. You may read the text either as heavenly *places* or heavenly *things*, and be equally correct. It is a wonderful thing that, even here on earth, the saints enjoy and experience heavenly blessings; for a new nature is a heavenly thing, and love, and joy in God, and rest, and safety, and acceptance in the Beloved are all heavenly things. If you read it “places,” it is equally true that heaven and all its mansions are ours, and we have already taken possession of them in Christ Jesus, our representative and forerunner. When God made the covenant with Abraham which gave to him the land of Canaan, Abraham had not yet a foot of land that he could call his own, and when he died

he only possessed a cave for burial; but yet, in truth, according to the decrees of heaven, the land of Canaan belonged to Abraham and his seed; for had not the Lord said, "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates?" They had the title-deeds of it, though for a while the Canaanites held it as tenants upon lease. Now, all the spiritual blessings which belong to the heavenly estate at this moment are the property of the heirs of heaven; and God hath said to each one of them, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it." The blessings laid up in reserve for those who love God are secured to them in the covenant made with Christ, and we wait only for the time when the Lord our God shall surely bring us into the purchased possession. All things needful for the heavenly life are already secured to the people of God in Christ Jesus, in whom also they have obtained an inheritance. My brother, does not this lift you up, and make you feel yourself to be a different man? You thought you had only a little grace, but all spiritual and heavenly blessings are yours. You never dreamed that you could touch heaven so closely; but heaven has a wide sweep, and is to be found not only in glory above, but in grace below. For God has made us kings even now—we are already in the kingdom of heaven, and upon heavenly manna we are fed at this day. Where Christ is, there is heaven, and he is in our hearts. The sun is above, but inasmuch as his light and heat are here, we say that we sit in the sun and bask in the sun; even so, though the presence of Jesus is in glory, yet we enjoy on earth that sacred revelation of God which is the centre and essence of heaven. Present grace is heaven begun in the soul. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him; what more can heaven be? Even now "he hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." That which God has given to us is not bounded by the narrow horizon of this present visible world, but he has given to us all heavenly things most richly to enjoy; the boundless glories of eternity even now belong to us by virtue of the Father's benediction, which he has pronounced on us in Christ Jesus. Only here let me enquire whether you belong to the company upon whom the divine blessing rests. Are you seeking to be saved by your own works? Then you are not saved by grace through Christ Jesus. Are you without faith in Christ? Then the heavenly blessing does not belong to you. The inheritance is secured to a seed who are by faith the children of faithful Abraham, born not after the flesh but after the Spirit. Can you say, I do believe in Jesus Christ, and fix my trust upon the promises of a faithful God? Then take possession of the covenant provision and be glad in the Lord.

We must not fail to note that the plenitude of spiritual and heavenly blessings *only comes to us in Christ*. It is not in ourselves that these boons are vested: we hold them by virtue of our union with the Lord Jesus. He is that golden casket in which the treasures of the covenant are enclosed and secured. He is our Trustee, holding the heritage for us; and this is the form of our tenure,—*"joint-heirs with Christ."* How precious then is our union with him! Of what vital importance is it to be bound up in the bundle of life with him! As without him we

can do nothing, so without him we can possess nothing. In him we have already received a thousand blessings in actual experience, and in him there is laid up a boundless supply for future enjoyment.

At the thought of this let our hearts sing hallelujahs. In the spirit of sonship let us reverence the Father of our spirits who is also the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation. Blessed, for ever blessed, be the Lord God of heaven and earth, for his unutterable goodness to his chosen in the person of his dear Son. Let us sing unto him :

“O measureless might!
 Ineffable love!
 While angels delight
 To hymn thee above,
 The humbler creation,
 Though feeble their lays,
 With true adoration
 Shall lisp to thy praise.”

III. Thirdly and briefly let us observe THE FIRST OUTFLOW OF THESE HEAVENLY BLESSINGS. The fountain of eternal love burst forth in our election—“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” Consider these words one by one. The first is, *he hath chosen*: God has a will and a choice in the matter of salvation. Some people do not like this doctrine, but they must have it whether they like it or not, or else they must reject the word of inspiration. Is man’s will to be deified? Is the whole result of the scheme of salvation to depend upon the creature’s choice? God forbid. The Father has made a choice of some men unto eternal life, these he has given to his Son Jesus; all these the Lord Jesus has redeemed with his own blood, and pledged himself to bring them to glory. Has he not said, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me?” God has made a choice, then, and you who are believers in Christ may rest assured that you are the objects of this choice. The Lord himself gave you your faith, and brought you into living union with Jesus; do you not bless him for this? It seems to me that here is something for which to praise and bless the Father world without end.

Carefully note that *election shapes everything*: the Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings, “According as he hath chosen us in Christ.” All the grace of earth and the glory of heaven come to us in accordance with the eternal choice. There is not a single boon that comes from the blessed hand of the divine Redeemer but is stamped with the mark of God’s electing love. We were chosen to each mercy, and each mercy was appointed for us. If we will not have the Father’s election we cannot have his blessing, for his gifts are plainly stated to be according to his choice: they come because of the choice, and they prove the choice; they should therefore remind us of our election, and call forth our sweetest songs. They should make us ask with David “Whence is this to me?” A man who is elect of God ought to sing the praises of God both day and night, for he is chosen to show forth the praises of Jehovah.

The next word is “he hath chosen *us*.” Herein is grace indeed. What could there be in us that the Lord should choose *us*? Some of us

feel ourselves the most unworthy of the unworthy, and we can see no trace of a reason for our being chosen. So far from being choice men in our own esteem, we feel ourselves by nature to be the very reverse. But if God has chosen *us* then let our hearts love him, our lips extol him, our hands serve him, and our whole lives adore him.

“Loved of my God, for him again
With love intense I burn :
Chosen of thee ere time began,
I choose thee in return.”

Then we are told *he has chosen us in Christ Jesus*. He first chose Christ as the head and then looked through Christ upon us and chose us to be members of Christ's mystical body. We are none of us chosen apart from Jesus Christ ; but we are chosen in Christ, loved in Christ, given to Christ, united to Christ, and accepted in Christ. This is a blessed way of being chosen ; for none can separate us from Christ, and consequently till the Father changes his choice of Christ, he cannot and will not reverse his choice of his people. Until Christ ceases to be God's elect, the Father can never cast away those who are chosen in Christ Jesus.

Moreover, we are told the time when this choice was made :—*Before the foundation of the world*. This is the earliest conceivable period. When this earth was fitted up for man we do know, for the Scriptures inform us, but how many ages elapsed before it was furnished for our race, we do not know ; yet long before that period the Father had chosen his people. The foundation of the world may mean its first creation, when it was spoken out of nothing : that must be ages of ages ago, but before that the Father chose us. Remember those words “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.” Before sun and moon had been created, or any of the visible things were formed, God had set his heart upon his people in Christ and ordained them to eternal life in him. God's love is no novelty. His choice is no sudden act. Blessed doctrine ! I know of none which, if rightly considered, has a greater tendency to draw out the intense affection and reverent admiration of human hearts. Did the Lord of glory choose me from before the foundation of the world ; then I choose him with all my heart to be my Lord, my all. Did he love me from of old ? Then I will love him with all my soul and strength, and pray that my heart may be enlarged to love him more. This is mentioned here in order that you may bless the Father : let there now flow from your hearts a mighty stream of gratitude which shall cover your whole being and bear your lives along in the channel of obedience. Come, my heart, bless the Father at this moment and never cease from his praise while life and being last or immortality endures.

IV. Fourthly and lastly, our text reminds us of another cause for praise, namely, the **DESIGNED RESULT OF ALL THIS BLESSING** : “That we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” *It is God's eternal design that his people should be holy*, and this purpose he has pursued at infinite cost. This is the design of all the blessings which the Father has given us in Christ. All these favours are a call to us

to be holy, and each one has a tendency to promote our sanctification. When you grow in grace, and faith, and hope, and joy, all that growth is towards holiness. Always think of that, and bless God for your graces by manifesting their influence in your conduct. Bless God for increased knowledge and deepened experience, for he has designed by these to sanctify you more fully to himself. There is something practical in every boon that comes from the Father's hand, and you should pray to him that you may by each one conquer sin, advance in virtue and perfect holiness in his fear. The ultimate end of election is the praise of the glory of divine grace, but the immediate and intermediate end is the personal sanctification of the chosen. We are chosen unto holiness.

The Father chose us to himself that we might be *without blame* before him in love. He would have us blameless, so that no man can justly find fault with us ; and harmless, so that our lives may injure none but bless all. Holiness is, however, more than this. We are called to be made whole by being healed of the disease of sin, and by having all our broken powers reunited into one harmonious whole. This restored nature is to be wholly consecrated to God, and thus to become holy before God. Oh that we may realize God's object in election even at this time, and so make our calling and election sure! Let us mightily strive after this, and never rest till we have it.

But notice where and what kind of holiness this is : holy and blameless *before him*. I have met with several people who say they are perfectly holy ; but I believe they are under a delusion, and I feel sure that those who watch them will not long think them perfect. This perfection of theirs is according to their own vain ideas and conceited notions, and not according to the judgment of the Lord, who searches the heart. Perfection in the flesh is a lie: I believe it to be one of the grossest falsehoods ever palmed on foolish minds. It would be something to be holy and blameless before the devil as Job was. It would be something to be perfect before the eyes of men who are so ready to criticize us ; but to be blameless *before him* who reads our thoughts and sees our every failure in a moment—this is an attainment of a far higher order. Oh, to be spotless and faultless ! Let us bless God that he is aiming every day to make us holy and blameless before himself ; and he will do it, for his purpose never fails. He has wrought it in a large measure in all his saints, and he will perfect that which he has begun. This is the goal towards which we are running, that we may attain to the complete likeness of Christ. Courage, brethren, it is yet beyond us, but he that hath begun the good work in us will perform it unto the day of Christ. We shall one day be without fault before the throne of God.

To conclude, we are to be holy and blameless before him *in love*. Love is the anointing oil which is to be poured on all the Lord's priests ; when he has robed them in their spotless garments, they shall partake of the unction of love. When he has delivered us from all sin, one choice thing shall be seen in us, and that is love—abounding love. “God is love ; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” As we love we live unto God. Perfect life will be perfect love. Judge of your sanctification by this—Do you grow in love to God? Do you also increase in love to the brethren? If your heart grows hard with

the proud notion that you are somebody by reason of your high attainments, and that the poor little saints around you are unworthy even to unloose the lachets of your shoes, you are not growing in holiness. Do you love poor sinners more? For if your heart does not grow tender you are not growing holy. What a blessed thing it would be to be saturated with love! They said of Basil, that he was a pillar of fire because of his zeal. I wish it could be said of us that we were flames of fire because of our love. Oh, to love our neighbour as ourselves, thinking no evil! "Oh," says one, "we should be imposed upon!" That would be no harm compared with being hardened by selfishness. "But we should be illtreated and defrauded." Suppose we were; it would be better than being miserly and cruel. The worst of ills is hate, the best of blessings is love. When we become incapable of selfishness, and get right away from unkindness of heart and uncharitableness of thought, Christ will be living in us and we in him, and then we shall be fulfilling the purpose of electing love and the design of the innumerable spiritual blessings which are already given us in Christ Jesus. To this let us all aspire. Let brotherly love continue. Let us love each other more than we have ever done, and join our hands anew in a firm league of concord. Let us love the universal church of Christ. Let our hearts burn with ardent affection towards the perishing multitudes of men, that we may bring them to put their whole trust in Jesus and live. May the Father deal with us according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus, and to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ephesians i.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—152, 195, 198.
