

CHOSEN FROM THE BEGINNING By Thomas Bradbury

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“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Thess. 2:13-14).

Glorious and terrible truths are stated by the Holy Ghost in this chapter. Glorious inasmuch as the glory of a sovereign God is revealed to the faith of God’s elect, the faith which worketh by love, overcomes the world, and has for its end the salvation of the soul. This faith is of the operation of God, and beholds wondrous glory where unbelief and carnal reason see nought but what is hateful and obnoxious. I speak not this in a spirit of railing, or with a desire to wound or offend, but wishful to speak plainly the things of God, that each of us may know something of the position we occupy in relationship to a covenant and sovereign God.

In this chapter we have described two distinct parties, who, in spiritual and eternal things, are at the very antipodes to each other. Look on this picture and on that. These He loves—those He hates. These He accepts—those He rejects. These He chooses to salvation—those He leaves to damnation. Do any of you object to this? Why, you do the same yourselves. You accept to your companionship and confidence whom you will, and yet question God’s right to do as He will. Look at the enemies of God! They aspire not to equality with Him, but to superiority over Him. They not only question His authority, but in their feelings and fancies they usurp His sovereignty. Poor, proud, and puny reason sets itself up in antagonism to eternal and infinite wisdom, calls into question the truths of Divine revelation, scouts the glorious doctrines of grace, and would drag JEHOVAH from His throne.

And, mark into that of Peter, and where you find altars and gods innumerable? Call this the temple of God? You might as well call any pig-sty in the world the temple of God. It is a temple of idolatry, blasphemy, and superstition, with nothing worthy of a covenant God about it. But notice the teaching of the whole New Testament Scripture in reference to the temple of God (I Cor. 3:16, 17): “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” Again (I Cor. 6:19): “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?” The temple of God is a spiritual temple, ye the spiritual worshippers oftentimes find therein that which is stated here: “So that he.” Who is he? Self, lordly reason, noble intellect, imperious self, “as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” We find all this in the natural tempers, wills, and dispositions of the children of God. Paul proceeds, “Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work.” What is this mystery of iniquity? Turn with me to III John verse 9: “I wrote unto the Church: but Diotrephes, who loveeth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.” There is the workings of the mystery of iniquity—a determination to be somebody and to appear to be somebody at the expense of the peace and prosperity of Zion and of the glory of God. Paul knew this by painful experience, therefore was qualified to write thus: “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work;

only He who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wWcked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming."

Let the Father appear in His pure electing love, and the world is sure to question! Let the Son appear as the Redeemer of His elect ones, and the devil is sure to oppose! Let the Spirit appear in His regenerating grace, and the flesh is sure to struggle against Him. But let the God of all grace make His way to a redeemed sinner's heart, and all these opposing forces are taken out of the way, and wicked self is seen in his true colors. But the Lord alone, "with the Spirit of His mouth and the brightness of His coming," can settle matters with him. We who know these things find the flesh in ourselves and our surroundings ever opposing God and His truth.

In the Book of the Revelation you see the opposition of the beast and the false prophet. I am not prepared in this to throw stones at the pope and the Turk—for I find so much of the Pope and of the Turk, too, in me, that I am constrained to cry to the God of all mercy to keep them down in me. After stating many startling truths the Apostle comes to this solemn declaration: "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." Can this be God's truth? It is God's truth, or it would not be here. Know you not that declaration in Isaiah 66:4? "I also will choose their delusion." Know ye not Micaiah's account of the LORD'S sending a lying spirit to deceive Ahab, and granting success to his lies? (I Kings 22:19-23). This is marvelous sovereignty. All attempts to disprove it must fail. Our reason bows, our faith adores before the revelation of such glorious mysteries. "That they all may be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in uprightness. But!" —This is one of God's "buts." I do love to look at them as they appear in the pages of God's most Holy Word, so sovereign, so gracious, as so many breakwaters to repel the surging billows of error and superstition. "But." Here we come to this precious text: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We will look at it in the order in which God the Holy Ghost has given it to us: —

I.—Confession and congratulation—"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord."

II.—Choice and Salvation—"Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation."

III.—Sanctification and Faith—"Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

IV.—Grace and glory—"Whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I.—CONFESSION AND CONGRATULATION—"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord." Here I would give you a hint. Was this epistle written to the Thessalonians? No! It was written "unto the Church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." But that is rather too distinguishing and too discriminating for the fleshly religious mind. Look at it! In God with all His fullness! In the Father with all His affection! In the Lord with all His sovereignty! In Jesus with all His salvation! In Christ with all His anointing! Now for these Paul, and Silas, and Timothy were bound to give thanks. It is a blessed privilege when a preacher of God's Gospel is constrained and moved by a gracious necessity—according to the words of the text he is bound, he cannot help himself, he must give thanks for the manifestation of covenant blessings and privileges to the people whom God has given to him in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

We will notice a few instances in these two epistles where thanksgiving is rendered to God for the conveyance and confirmation of covenant mercies to the saints at Thessalonica. God to the first epistle, 1:2-4: "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers." You may rest assured that there will be very little thanksgiving where there is no praying. See! I do not make my appearance in this pulpit without groans, and sighs, and cries; and these not presented by way of duty,

but produced of necessity by the hidden movements of God the Holy Ghost, that my brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus may be instructed, refreshed, and comforted through His testimony from my exercised heart. You whom I know in the bonds of the covenant, in the freedom of the Gospel, in brokenness of spirit at His sacred feet, are oftentimes remembered as I walk by the way, as I lay my head on the pillow, and as He shuts me out from the world in hallowed seclusion with Himself. I cannot help but make mention of you in my prayers. You ask, What kind of prayers are these? I answer, Ejaculations, sighs, desires, and longings, somethings only a breathing homeward, heavenward, Godward, that in the riches of His grace and mercy He may bless, instruct, comfort, and preserve you, and keep us humble at the feet of a dear Redeemer, so that, when our anxious heads are throbbing and our weary hearts are aching, we may find a sweet pillow of rest upon His ever-loving bosom—I can truly say that the burden of my preaching and of my prayers is that you may be kept very near to Himself. But to return! “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.”

Now turn to the third chapter of the first epistle and 6th verse: “but now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.” That is to say, we live hopefully and joyfully in witnessing your faith and fortitude, and in the enjoyment of fellowship in union with you. “For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?”

Look now at II Thess. 1:3: “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly.”

Some of you are ready to say, That is not me, for I cannot see that I grow at all. If there is a growth it is in the knowledge and loathing of my heart’s depravity and deceitfulness. Well, my friends, there is only one spot where such knowledge is truly gained, and that is in the presence of redeeming Love. The more we grow in love with Jesus, and the more we are sure to grow in distrust and in disgust with ourselves. “We are bound to thank God.” Paul and his companions were worshipping priests in union with Christ, offering the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving on the behalf of those whose election of God was known, whose faith grew and whose love abounded. In this confession of what was known of the Thessalonian Christians, they are congratulated as “brethren beloved of the Lord.” Brethren, one with Jesus in the bonds of the everlasting covenant of grace, in eternal election, in all-wise predestination, and by spiritual regeneration. Jesus is the Elder Brother, the Firstborn among many brethren; brethren in the family of God who are brought and taught by the Holy Ghost to know their unchanging oneness with Him.

II.—CHOICE AND SALVATION—“Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.” Here we have a glorious reason why God receives the thanksgivings of poor sinners—“Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.” I wonder how many pulpits in London today have heralded out thanksgiving to God for the sovereign, unconditional, and irrevocable election of His people in Christ Jesus? Or, I would ask, How many preachers in London, destitute of the faith of God’s elect, and ignorant of the love of a covenant God in Christ Jesus, have in their hearts been cursing this glorious truth? I speak advisedly and deliberately in asking these questions, knowing that every unregenerate person in his inmost soul despises the sovereignty of God, calls into question His everlasting love, and delights to laugh to scorn the elect of God.

Well, blessed be God, there is one pulpit at least, if it is near the top of a hill, and in an out-of-the-way

spot, where the covenant verities of JEHOVAH are honestly declared, and His glorious sovereignty, though feebly, yet fearlessly, faithfully and feelingly proclaimed. Why say I this? Because I desire to be singular amongst the preachers and teachers of the day? No! I say it because God has so united Himself to me, a poor, sinful worm, that I cannot help but speak the things that I have seen and heard concerning Him, and sound forth His praises. He has manifested His love to me in days gone by and up to the present moment in such a wonderful and gracious manner, that it behooves me to uphold His glorious sovereignty before men with every word of my tongue, every action of my body, and every volition of my mind. O may He entwine the affections of His own elect and called ones more closely round my poor heart, and may I find my affection clinging more closely to His elect, despised, and persecuted ones. But let us now look at this part of the text in the light of God's Word, that is Scripturally, and may the Spirit of wisdom, and revelation enlighten our understanding and comfort our hearts.

"God hath from the beginning." What does this mean, from the beginning of time? Previous to that! Previous to that! "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). But the choice of the eternally loved people of God was—

"Long ere time its race began."

It took place in that period before time, which we, through our shortsightedness, call eternity past. The command of the Father to the Son, the Surety of the covenant, was, "Prepare Thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build Thine house" (Prov. 24:27). Preparation for the work of redemption was made without, or outside. Outside what? Time. Time is that short parenthesis separated, or cut off from eternity, beginning with the creation as recorded in Genesis 1:1, and ending with the declaration of the angel, who "sware by Him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer" (Rev. 10:6). Previous to creation's work, ere time had its being, elect man dwelt in the thoughts of God. But one portion of God's most Holy Word confirmatory of a truth is better than a whole hour's argument; therefore, turn with me to John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Now look at the first verse of His first epistle: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." What beginning is this? Turn to Proverbs 8:22, 23: "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." As you read the subsequent part of this chapter, you will see that God's works of old were, laying the foundations of the earth, preparing the heavens, and strengthening the foundations of the deep. Now turn to Psalms 102:25, quoted by the apostle in Hebrews 1:10: "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Thy hands." But see: "The beginning of His way before His works of old," was His election of His people in Christ Jesus, and the manifestation of His love to them in that eternal, unconditional, irrevocable act. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." If we want further Spiritual proof, let us turn to Matthew 25:34: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Again, Ephesians 1:4: "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." Again: "Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." Now look at this:

"Chosen you to salvation." Here we have God's election, God's choice. Some of you may be ready to ask, What is God's election? It is God's choice of a people for Himself, in whom He will be everlastingly glorified. This may not be clear enough for you. Well, if you were in the North of England, you would often hear an old Saxon phrase like this, "Pick which you like." Pick or choose! What is it to pick or choose? Let us be plain here. You go into a shop, when certain articles are put before you. The person

waiting upon you says, "Pick or choose which you like. This does not mean that you are to take the whole lot, but that you are to take those you prefer and leave the rest. When God's Word speaks of His choice, His election, it means that He, in His counsel and covenant, chose a people to be saved in Christ with an everlasting salvation, and left the rest who are born in sin, live in sin, love sin, die in sin, and perish in sin. O, say you, I cannot believe that! Who said you could? Who asked you to believe it? I never ask any one to believe this solemn but very precious truth, it being my privilege by God's grace to "preach the Word," and leave Him to do His own work, for—

"Application is the work of God alone."

"God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." Has He chosen you as the sheep of the good Shepherd, the bride of the heavenly Bridegroom, the heirs of His glory, and the partners of His throne? Glorious choice! He has knit together His elect in one fellowship in the mystical body of His dear Son to experience His salvation here below, and His glory up yonder.

"Christ be My First Elect, He said,

Then chose our souls in Christ our Head,

Before He gave the mountains birth,

Or laid foundations for the earth."

He chose Christ as His First Elect, and then gave His elect people into His safe keeping. All in Christ are elected. All out of Christ are rejected. This is God's solemn truth. But if you want still further confirmation in these precious verities, turn to Romans 11:5: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." Were it not for the election of grace would be an utter impossibility. No election no salvation! Without God's election the eternal damnation of all Adam's race would be certain. This is the truth, whether you believe it or reject it. Mark well that solemn declaration in Romans 9:11: "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." This is election, irrespective of works, merit, or anything seen in the creature, simply because He had a favor unto us. Some of His elect within these walls this evening may be sighing and crying, and inwardly inquiring, How am I to know that I am one of those for whom thanksgiving is rendered to God because of their election? To such I say, Notice the fruits of election abounding in the text.

"Chosen you to salvation." Salvation "according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9). Salvation in the Person, blood, and obedience of Jesus. "He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Salvation by the power and gracious indwelling of the blessed Spirit from Satan, sin, the world, and self. Look at this! "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Rom. 13:11). What does that mean? That a day is coming when we shall put off this body of death and corruption, when we shall be everlastingly free from all sin, suffering, and sorrow, when we shall enter into the presence of the King, and sing through a never-ending and glorious eternity, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb."

If at this very moment the curtain which hides the heavenly country from our view could be drawn aside, and we were permitted to cast our eyes over the vast multitude of elect, redeemed, and glorified sinners, we should not see a single free-willer or co-operater there. There is no free-willer in glory. Every will is swallowed up in that of a sovereign God. Not one discordant note of creature merit, nor jarring sound of man's free-will can mar the sweet music of the glorified saints' song of everlasting praise to God. He hath chosen us to salvation, therefore we must be saved. If there is any failure between eternal choice and everlasting glory there must be a reflection on the character, love, wisdom, and power of JEHOVAH. But, blessed be His holy name, there is no failure seen by His own taught ones, and no reflection cast upon Him by any of His own who are brought into experimental union with Himself. We will now consider how we are to know that we are saved.

III.—SANCTIFICATION AND FAITH—"Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

Sanctification! What is it? It is setting apart, laying aside, consecrating, or separating to solemn and

spiritual purposes. The most essential part of sanctification lies in the Source or Fountain thereof. Creature power, or creature holiness, have no place here, it being wholly of the Lord. See! it is set before us in the New Testament in its origin, work, and perfection. I love to view it in its sevenfold aspect. 1. Sanctified by the Father (Jude 1). 2. Sanctified by the Son (Eph. 5:26). 3. Sanctified by the Holy Ghost (II Thess. 2:13). 4. Sanctified by faith that is in Christ (Acts 26:18). 5. Sanctified by the Word of truth (John 17:17). 6. Sanctified with His own blood (Heb. 13:12). 7. Sanctified wholly (I Thess. 5:23). Do we know and love the Father? Then we are sanctified or separated from the world. Is Jesus revealed in us as our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, Redemption, and Glory? Then we are sanctified, or separated, from the service of the devil. Is the Holy Ghost our Teacher, Guide, and Comforter? Then we are sanctified, or separated, from allegiance to the flesh. Is the faith of God's Christ (Gal. 2:20), of God's elect (Titus 1:1), of God's operation (Col. 2:13) precious to you? Then you are sanctified from the faith of devils, and from the false duty-faith of fleshly professors. Has the Word of truth come with living power to your heart? Then you are sanctified, or separated, from every word save that of Jesus. Is the blood of Christ your only plea for acceptance? Then you are sanctified, or separated, from all the vain hopes and fleshly endeavors which characterize a carnal religion. Is Christ Jesus made of God unto you Sanctification? Then you are sanctified, or separated, wholly to God. This sanctification is seen, not in the improving, mending, or progressive renovation of our wretched fleshly nature; but in beholding the flesh in all its deformity and depravity low in the dust, while the elect sinner sighs for the period when, divested of the burden of the flesh, he will be for ever shut in with God, away from sin, and Satan, and hateful self.

"And belief of the truth." Belief of the truth, or obedience thereto, is the means God has appointed and retains in His own hands for the purification of the soul (I Pet. 1:22) and the manifest sanctification of the saints (John 17:17). This is too simple for unsanctified souls, hence their endless objections to God having all things His own way with His own. Oh, say they, your election and sanctification does away with prayer, believing, and good works. Nay, Master Objector, you are totally wrong. We believe and maintain that all things pertaining to life and godliness are of God. Election is of God! sanctification is of God! prayer is of God! faith is of God! good works are of God! Turn to Luke 18:7: "And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?" Is that doing away with prayer? No! the grace of election and the spirit of grace and supplication are inseparable in living souls. Look here! Titus 1:1: "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness." Here we see faith and election joined together by Divine decree and Divine power, and none can put them asunder. Now what about good works? Turn to Isaiah 65:22: "For as the days of a tree are the days of My people, and Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." God's elect, who are quickened into life by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, are a praying, believing, and working people; but they can neither pray, believe, or work at will, or by the authority, command, or dictation of mortals. Blessed be His Name, they pray, they believe, they work, not to influence His love, but because His love is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost. We now consider briefly, —

IV.—GRACE AND GLORY—"Whereunto He called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Election and sanctification are revealed in calling. We see two callings in the Bible, one outward, the other inward. The outward sounds in the natural ear, the inward is received and obeyed by the spiritual understanding. See Matthew 20:16: "Many be called, but few chosen." Look at Revelation 17:14: "And they that are with Him are called, and chosen, and faithful." In both of these quotations calling comes first. This is illustrated in the case of Gideon's warriors. Numbers responded to his call, but comparatively few stood JEHOVAH'S test. So in God's call, the declaration of God's Gospel, the preaching of His Word, only those who stand the fire and endure the furnace are the chosen of God. The fleshly mind will object, Oh! if that is the truth then away goes all necessity for diligence. Don't be in a hurry! Just ask our friend Peter. Listen! "Brethren give diligence to make your calling and election

sure" (II Pet. 1:10). Calling, election, and diligence appear here in sweet harmony, and all elect vessels of mercy within the sound of my voice know that when called by the sovereign grace and love of God to hate sin, dread Satan, and fear temptation, they do give diligence to make their calling and election sure. Sure, not in respect to God, but in their own heart's experience. Objector asks, "Is this sureness dependent upon my diligence? No more than the sustenance of your body is dependent upon the food you eat. God gives the appetite, God give the food, God gives His blessing on what is eaten, to the nourishing and building up of the body. God is first, God is last, God is everything in providence and grace to His own Spirit-taught children.

"Our Gospel." Not a yea and nay Gospel, but one which proclaims a full, free, and everlasting salvation for all who spiritually need it.

"The obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Not the incommunicable glory of His Godhead, but the obtaining, that is by the lot, or will of JEHOVAH, the glory which He treasured up in Him before all worlds, the glory of His kingdom, for He is our Lord, the glory of His salvation, for He is our Jesus; the glory of His communications, for He is our Christ, the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King. See how this is confessed from His opened heart to the Father, in John 17:22: "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them." Precious Saviour! privileged sinners! See! He commands: "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 lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (ver. 24). The love of the Father to the Son revealed in His sons and daughters in the glory bestowed upon and obtained by the election of grace.

May the Lord add His blessing. Amen.

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