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*The Seventeenth Article of Religion Considered.*

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## SERMON

PREACHED IN ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL, NEW-YORK,

AT THE

OPENING OF THE GENERAL CONVENTION

OF THE

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH

IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

On Wednesday, October 6th, 1841.

*Order sent*







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On Wednesday, October 6th, 1841.

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BY BENJAMIN T. ONDERDONK, D. D.

Bishop of the Diocese of New-York, and Professor of the Nature, Ministry  
and Polity of the Church in the General Theological Seminary.

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## S E R M O N .

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ROMANS, 8 : 29.

*Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate.*

The announcing of these words as the text on which is to be founded the usual discourse at the opening of this solemn and important council of the church, may possibly suggest the idea of the preacher's intention to embark in the wide range of theological controversy which the weakness and narrowness of human judgment has sought out in those parts of God's revealed word that relate to the high mysteries of his foreknowledge and predestination. Not so. My object is of a more immediate and practical bearing upon the occasion of our present assembling. We meet on the common ground of attachment to the doctrinal standards of our church. Among them our seventeenth article of religion is, it is well known, most extensively discussed. From its supposed meaning, ground is often taken for accusing the great body of our clergy of inconsistency with the faith of their church, and also for representing our standards as inconsistent with themselves. I purpose, brethren, making this article the present particular subject of consideration, and drawing from it, as God may give me ability, reflections suitable to the sacred occasion on which we have come together.

Let me, however, first crave indulgence for most sincerely disavowing all desire or effort to dictate. I am aware that some difference of opinion exists among us respecting this article. The difference is honest and sincere on all sides. The present well-meant effort to promote unity of views, will, I humbly hope, be as well received, although I may not succeed in producing in others as thorough a conviction

of its soundness as that which has impelled to its adoption. And even if there should not be entire accordance with the views presented, I will yet venture to hope that the practical conclusions to which they are brought will be suffered to stand upon their own merits, and not be denied the influence which, by God's blessing, they may be calculated to have, for good, on the present council of the church.

The celebrated Pascal has, in his "Thoughts," a sound rule for the interpretation of Scripture, which ought also, in justice, to be applied, as far as practicable, to all other works. "In order to a right understanding of Scripture," he observes, "we ought to find out a sense in which all the seemingly opposite places shall agree. Nor is it sufficient to have an interpretation in which many consonant passages shall be united; but we must have one in which the most dissonant shall meet and conspire."

This is no more than the dictate of common justice. Every man, and of course every author, should be supposed to be consistent with himself, unless it be made to appear that his conduct or his sentiments can admit of no other construction than what necessarily involves inconsistency. This is a measure of justice which we all expect, and which, therefore, upon christian principles, we should all be willing cheerfully to extend.

If this is true with regard to man in his individual, it is no less so in reference to his social capacity. Bodies of men are entitled to the same justice that is due to their members personally; especially in their solemn official acts and declarations.

To apply this principle. Our branch of the catholic church has authoritatively set forth a volume which, in forms of divine service, creeds, articles, and other documents, is the solemn declaration of her view of the doctrines of the Gospel. Of this volume she asks that it be "examined with a meek, candid, and charitable frame of mind, without prejudice or prepossessions." She has a right to expect this, and is justified in requiring that the judgment formed of every particular part should be regulated and qualified by



a general knowledge and fair application of the current sense of the whole. She presumes not, indeed, to claim for her standards the infallibility of inspiration ; nor therefore to say that inconsistency in those standards, as in revelation, is impossible. She asks, however, that this inconsistency be not presumed ; and that it be not charged, unless it is the inevitable result of a fair construction of her standards. She knows of no writings, not even the Divine word itself, in which, if insulated passages be taken without regard to their connection, the most palpable inconsistencies may not be made to appear. She knows, however, that in all writings, divine and human, many passages which, abstractly taken, appear to convey a certain sense, will yet as plainly bear another, when considered in their proper connection with the general scope and object of the writings of which they are parts, and with due regard to the qualifications and limitations imposed by other portions of the same works. These—it is an obvious dictate of sound sense and common justice—should always control the rule and measure of interpretation.

These remarks are deemed especially appropriate to a consideration of our seventeenth article of religion. The most confident appeals have been made to that article by persons both within and without the pale of the church in proof that she is calvinistic in her doctrines ; and they are often connected with preconceived prejudices on the subject which ought to give way before the article can be expected to receive a fair and impartial examination.

Against this view of the article a strong presumption lies in the fact that our standards generally are inconsistent with the leading peculiarities of calvinism.

The doctrine of partial redemption is one of those peculiarities, and one essentially interwoven with the system. It maintains that the mediation of Christ was designed for those only who, by virtue of an irrelative divine decree, were, from all eternity, distinguished from the mass of mankind by being destined to salvation. There is, indeed, a very respectable portion of those professing the calvinistic

creed, who, not maintaining with the others, that redemption and salvation are necessarily connected, admit of a universal *redemption*, although supposing the benefit of *salvation* to be entirely dependent on the above-mentioned decree. The two systems, therefore, may be considered, as far as the present argument is concerned, as virtually the same. The real and substantial benefit of Christ's redemption—and that, indeed, for which only we can conceive of the necessity of that redemption—is limited to the few thus eternally chosen to the privilege. They only were in the Divine mind, as to receive its full and ultimate benefit, when that redemption was counselled and effected.

Is this the church's doctrine? "The offering of Christ once made," says the thirty-first article, "is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for *all the sins of the whole world*, both original and actual." "The Prayer of Consecration" in the communion uses much the same language—"Jesus Christ made upon the cross, by His one oblation of Himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of *the whole world*." In the catechism, the catechumen is taught to say, in reference to the creed, "I learn to believe in God the Son, who hath redeemed *me*, and *all mankind*;" and to express his hearty thanks to his Heavenly Father, for having "*called*" him, by baptism, into a "*state of salvation*." In the litany we address God the Son as the "Redeemer of the *world*."

Such, I need not say to the present congregation, is far from being the language of the calvinistic standards. It is decidedly opposed to it, and is, I doubt not, seen by you to be in accordance with the blessed, evangelical doctrine that Christ tasted of death for every man; that He is the Propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and that He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

It, of course, follows from the system to which ours is here supposed to be in contrariety, that all the blessings of the covenant in Christ Jesus are theirs only who are inclu-

ded in the supposed fixed personal decree which lies at the foundation of that system.

In our baptismal services, *every child and person baptized* is declared to be "born again, and *made an heir of everlasting salvation.*" In the "Order of Confirmation," the bishop, in reference to *all who come to be confirmed*, having in view their previous baptism, uses these words:—"Almighty and Ever-living God, who hast vouchsafed to *regenerate* these thy servants, and hast given unto them *forgiveness of all their sins.*" In the communion, it is said of *all* "who have duly received" the "holy mysteries," that God does "thereby assure" them "that" they "are *heirs, through hope, of*" His "*everlasting kingdom.*" These passages, speaking the current sense of our standards, clearly give a view of the evangelical dispensation totally different from that which regards it as founded on an eternal and irrespective election of individuals.

No important part, also, of the evidence that our standards are not calvinistic, is the entire absence in them of what forms a part of all standards professedly so, a recognition of the awful doctrine of reprobation, or the consigning, from all eternity, of those not chosen to life, to everlasting perdition; and this often connected with the doctrine of the necessity of sinning imposed upon them by God himself.

Did time allow, the anti-calvinistic character of our standards might be further proved from the sentiments of the reformers of the church of England who fixed those standards; and from the clearly-established fact, that of the earlier continental reformers, the standards of those of the Lutheran and not of the Calvinistic school were principally had in view in constructing those of the church of England. Connected with this argument, also, reference might be made to the well-known generally, if not universally, prevalent sentiments of those who were concerned in fixing the standards of the American church.

I trust it will not now be deemed a hasty conclusion, that our ecclesiastical standards, as a whole, are adverse to the calvinistic system. According, therefore, to the just princi-

ples above noticed, the same must be presumed of any particular portion of those standards, unless it be made to appear that such portion will not admit of a construction consistent with the character of the whole.

It would perhaps be wrong to treat on a subject like that now before us, without reference to what appears to be undoubtedly a fact—a desire on the part of the framers of the articles to adapt them to a peaceful union with the church of moderate men, notwithstanding any bias which they may have towards counter peculiarities of doctrine. Without granting that they thereby designed the large license for diversity of doctrine, or the mere negative character of the articles—as if they were intended to declare merely what should *not be opposed*, and not what it is a *duty to enforce*—for which some contend; I think there is ground for admitting that the moderation referred to has given to the language of some of the articles an apparent want of point and of decision.

With these preliminary remarks, I proceed to a consideration of the seventeenth article; hoping to make it appear that it will admit of a very natural interpretation not inconsistent with the anti-calvinistic tenor of our standards generally, and according to which it may be rendered the source of much edification both to individual christians and the church collectively. Nor ought we to be insensible to the fact that a contrary interpretation would be an arraying of the church against herself, by representing her as enforcing different doctrines in different parts of her standards.

The article is entitled “Of Predestination and Election,” and is in the following words:—

Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honor. Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God’s purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through grace obey the calling: they

be justified freely: they be made Sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works; and at length by God's mercy they attain to everlasting felicity.

As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation, to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: so, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture: And in our doings, that will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God.

Every reasonable person who wishes to enter candidly and fairly into the consideration of a *subject*, will dismiss from his mind all prepossessions arising out of mere *words*. *Predestination* is a term, which, by improper concession, usually suggests at once to the mind the idea of the calvinistic theory of the divine decrees. To say, then, that the church acknowledges predestination, is, in the estimation of superficial thinkers, tantamount to saying that she acknowledges that theory; just as, in popular misapprehension, the term *catholic* is strangely misapplied to the peculiarities of the church of Rome. This is obviously wrong and unreasonable. We should take the church's own definition of the terms she uses, and understand them in that sense, discarding any view of them which may be the result of their popular misapplication.

Before suffering ourselves, therefore, to attach any particular meaning to the word "predestination" here used, we should endeavor clearly to ascertain what the church under-

stands by it ; for it will be remembered that the present purpose is not so much the vindication and defence of the doctrine concerned, as the ascertaining of what *is* the doctrine as set forth in the standards of the church.

“ Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) He hath constantly decreed, by His counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind ; and to bring them, by Christ, to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honor.”

Here a certain purpose of God is predicated of a certain description of individuals, denominated “ those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind.” Now, who are these ? The *inquiry* is not presumptuous, but any *answer*, not from the mouth of God himself, would be so. Have we such an answer ? To the law and to the testimony let us appeal.

To “ *the Church of the Thessalonians*” St. Paul says, “ Knowing, brethren beloved, your *election of God* ;” and again, “ We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, 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.” St. Peter sends a salutation to those to whom his first epistle is addressed, from “ the church at Babylon,” which he declares to be “ *elected* together with ” them. The “ *calling and election* ” of those to whom he addressed his second epistle, he exhorts them to “ *make sure*.” Of “ the church at Corinth,” although blamed for many and grievous departures from christian consistency, St. Paul says, “ God is faithful, by whom ye were *called unto* the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord ;” and evidently speaks of their *calling* as synonymous with their reception into the church. With “ the churches of Galatia ” St. Paul finds much and grievous fault. “ O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth ?” “ I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.” And yet of these

same Galatians he says, "Ye are *all* the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." In reference to this great personal unworthiness of the privileges and blessings that appertained to them as members of the church, and to the great guilt of this inconsistency, he thus expresses his affectionate concern, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that *called you* into the *grace of Christ*." Throughout the epistle to the Romans, the Jews, as the church under the former, and christians as the church under the latter dispensation, are often called the elect, the election, and by similar epithets. And in various other parts of his epistles—indeed those epistles generally may be said to be thus characterised—St. Paul uses such epithets as applicable to the body at large—the church in which he ministered. "Having predestinated *us* unto the adoption of children." "In whom also *we* have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things according to the purpose of His own will." A multitude of similar passages might be added.

Hence, and from the general tenor of Scripture, it appears that "those whom God hath chosen," elected, or called "in Christ out of mankind," are *the church*, which, according to the original Scripture term, signifies *the called*. And it may be safely affirmed that no other calling, election, or predestination, at least in connection with the privileges of the evangelical covenant, is known in Scripture. Nor can any trace of belief in any other be found in the early christian fathers until the time of St. Augustine in the fifth century. This fact is certainly a strong presumptive argument against the theory of a personal irrespective election being evangelical. If it was a part of the Gospel, the good and great men who lived during, and for three hundred years after, the days of the apostles, could not, in their writings, have so totally avoided any notice of it. Indeed, the principle of determinate decrees affecting individual character and

state, is opposed by several early fathers in their apologies for christianity.

The passage, however, in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, whence the text is taken, is often quoted as conclusive against these views, and in favor of the doctrine of individual election. "Whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

The obvious design of this epistle, as appears from the whole tenor of it, is to vindicate to the Jews the divine justice and goodness in what was to them matter of much complaint—the admission of the Gentiles to partake with them in the privileges and blessings of the covenant or church of God. The apostle represents the ultimate reception of the Gentiles into the church as having been, all along, designed, ordained, or predestinated by the Almighty. They, as was the case formerly with the Jews only, were, by admission into the church, to become the elect, the chosen, the called, according to the purpose of God's will. God, foreknowing or foreseeing this as a part of his great and gracious plan, did "predestinate" or determine to bring it to pass; and thus to make the Gentiles *christians*, "conformed," in holiness here and glory hereafter, "to the image of his Son." For the accomplishment of this gracious purpose, he, in his good time, "called" these Gentiles by sending to them the ministers of his church, and receiving them into its holy communion. They thus became "justified," or admitted to that state of justification or favor and acceptance with God in Christ, which is the privilege of church-membership, or a covenant-relation to Jesus Christ. "And whom he justified, them he also glorified." This, like the several other propositions in the sentence, being expressed in the past tense, would appear to refer to some blessing already imparted to those who had been called into the church; probably the glorious honor and privileges which had thus



been bestowed upon them; their exaltation from the heathen ignorance and superstition in which they had been sunk; their admission to the membership of that church which is all glorious within; their adoption into the family of the King of Glory; the title thus conferred on them, through Christ, to the sanctification of God's Holy Spirit; and the access thus ministered to the means of that grace which is to carry the faithful children of the covenant onward, from glory to glory, until they attain to the excellent glory of inheritance with the saints in light.

Any understanding of the word "glorified" here used, as implying a present certainty of future eternal glory, and a fixed and immoveable interest in it, would be opposed as well to the probationary character of the Gospel in general, as especially to the strongly marked case of St. Paul, who uniformly speaks of himself as one of the elect, the chosen, the called, the predestinated, and yet expresses his deep and humble solicitude lest he should ultimately become a cast-away.

That a general or corporate, and not a personal election is meant by the apostle in this passage, is further obvious from expressions which immediately follow it, "What shall we say then to these things? If God be for *us*"—for the church—"who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for *us all*, how shall he not, with him also, freely give us all things?"

In perfect accordance, then, with Scripture, is the church's doctrine that every one baptized is, by baptism, made a member of Christ, that is of his church, and thus one of his elect, his chosen, his called, his predestinated; a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven; and thus *called into a state of salvation*.

This view of predestination and election, it will be perceived, has no reference to individual personal character. It is a predestination of a body of men, the church, to glorious and gracious spiritual privileges, not necessarily involving the ultimate attainment of those privileges by every member of that body. God has not been pleased to reveal to us any

predestination touching the eternal state of individuals. We, therefore, know of none, and should presume none. But he has been pleased to reveal the awfully momentous truth that we who, by being in the church, are of the number of his called and his elect, must give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, by diligent and devout application, in true faith, to the means which he has appointed for our growth in holiness here, and our attainment, through Christ's merits, to everlasting happiness hereafter.

Is, now, the seventeenth article inconsistent with the evangelical view of the subject, thus set forth in Scripture, and adopted, illustrated, and enforced by the church?

Through that depravity, brought upon our nature by its fall, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, "curse and damnation" must be our inevitable portion, unless the mercy of God interposes to avert the awful doom. It does interpose. Christ, the Mediator, appears in our behalf. By his atonement he renders divine mercy consistent with divine justice, and by his merit procures divine grace for man. God, in consideration of this mediation, wills, counsels, decrees, predestinates—for they all mean the same thing—that man shall be delivered from this curse and damnation. This design of God, however, is, of course, consistent with himself, and with his dispensations. It recognizes man as a moral and responsible agent. It cannot, therefore, compel him to be saved, but enables him to be saved. It puts salvation within his reach, and makes it his own concern to see that it is secured. God might, if he had chosen, have made man other than a moral agent. But he has not chosen to do so, and therefore regulates all his dispensations with a regard to man's moral agency. He proposes to man a plan whereby this deliverance from curse and damnation may be effected. At its foundation lies the great atonement of his Son as the only procuring cause of grace and mercy. In that Son, Christ Jesus the Lord, is provided a covenant-relation between God and man; and this relation is furnished in the church. To this he makes his promises, coupled with the conditions which he is pleas-

ed to impose, and has entrusted it with the dispensing of the means and pledges of his grace and mercy. They who are brought into this covenant-relation to God are thus "chosen in Christ out of mankind." They are in that state in which "God hath decreed to deliver" men "from curse and damnation, and bring them, by Christ, to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honor." This is the privilege of those who are in this covenant-state, the blessings of which, but for their own fault, will be secured to them.

This is the fundamental doctrine of the article: that the church is invested with the high honor and precious privilege of being the appointed medium through which deliverance is promised from the curse and damnation consequent on human depravity and wickedness. The deliverance is indeed promised, as all God's promises are made to men, on conditions required by him. In default of which conditions the blessing promised is wickedly rejected, and a case presented analogous to many noticed in holy writ, in which the divine purpose is thwarted and turned aside by man's ingratitude agreeably to the warnings and threatenings of God himself. Failure by the members of the church to make their calling and election sure, as God has ordered that it should be done, is their resistance of the counsel of God against themselves, and their incurring the tremendous guilt of neglecting the great salvation placed within their reach.

The article proceeds to state the process by which this calling and election is to be made sure, and the promised blessings of the covenant thus enjoyed.

"They which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God," that is, they who are admitted to the precious spiritual privileges and blessings of membership of Christ's church, "be called according to God's purpose—this gracious purpose of spiritual and eternal good to his church—" by his Spirit, working in due season," *at a fitting time*, according to the article as originally framed in Latin. The idea herein contained appears to be, that the call referred to comes through appropriate means, under circumstances of time, place, and occurrences, adapted to serious spiritual impres-

sions. We are rarely to look for it supernaturally, and never irresistibly. It comes in the course of divine providence, through some of the unnumbered and constantly occurring events and dispensations which call to serious reflection and consideration, and through the graciously established means of conversion and sanctification which are provided in the church.

“They, through grace, obey the calling.” This must be of free will, or it cannot be obedience. And Scripture and experience unite in testifying that it must be through grace, or our weak and frail nature could not effect it. The grace, however, is offered, not forced upon us; else, also, there would be contradiction to God’s design that we should be moral and responsible agents. Let the grace be duly received, the call obeyed, the true and living faith which it enjoins, cherished as the vital principle of all godliness, and the life and conduct regulated accordingly; and all is safe. Free justification is awarded. The glorious liberty of the sons of God is enjoyed. Conformity to the image of his only begotten Son—so great is God’s mercy in favorably regarding man’s poor services, and allowing them, if but rendered in true faith, to be covered with the merits of the sufficient righteousness of Christ, and thus, coming up with acceptance before Him, to be regarded as *in Christ*—conformity to the image of his only begotten Son is attained. The happy subjects of this “so excellent a benefit of God,” by the grace, and with the holy motives, thus furnished, “walk religiously in good works; and at length, by God’s mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.” Yes; *by God’s mercy*. Not by their faith or by their works. Neither can justify or save them. In our most confiding faith, and our highest righteousness, we can be but unprofitable servants, miserably deficient in aught that can commend us to God. In our utmost human ability, we are but weak, and totally insufficient. Our own merit, nay, our total want of merit, would inevitably sink us to the depths of perdition. The earliest and feeblest movements of our hearts towards goodness come of that grace which, by virtue of Christ’s redemption, was re-

stored to our nature after its fall. Every subsequent advance in holiness is the result of an increase of grace, consequent, by God's mere mercy, on the use of means in themselves totally insufficient. The highest grade of goodness to which we can possibly attain is full of unworthiness and imperfection. It can be acceptable and available only for the sake of our Great Advocate with the Father. Therefore is it rightly added in the article, as we are bound to own in the fullest sense, that it is only "*by God's mercy*" that the very best "attain to everlasting felicity."

"Sweet, pleasant and unspeakable," indeed, is the "comfort" derived from "the godly consideration of predestination and our election in Christ." "*Our election,*" says the article, clearly representing it as a blessing common to the church. Yes, brethren, fellow-members of the mystical body of Christ, this election in Him is indeed ours. It is yours. It is mine. We, blessed be God, are among those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind. Glorious and exalted, indeed, is our privilege; but O! how great our guilt, and how horrible the punishment, if we walk not worthy of this vocation wherewith we are called, and make not this our calling and election sure!

"Full," indeed, "of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort," is the reflection that, by God's grace, we are obeying this heavenly calling, and may, therefore, cherish the sure and certain hope of attaining, through his mercy, to the end, even the salvation of our souls. And to the attainment of this hope, this "sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort," no supernatural assurance is necessary. The word of God does not authorize expectation of this. Nor a state of highly-wrought ecstasy. There is no promise of this in Scripture. An humble consciousness, a practical proof within ourselves, of "the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and" our "earthly members, and drawing up" our "mind to high and heavenly things,"—these are the only substantial grounds of christian hope.

Thus is our faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed

through Christ, established and confirmed, and our love to God enkindled. In that state of calling and election which God has established in his church, and having warranted reason to trust that, by his grace, we are making it sure, what shall separate us from the love of him? His promise, counsel, and predestination are our security. Our hearts, therefore, shall not be moved. They may often fail to succor us from their own resources; but God will be the strength of our heart and our portion for ever.

But "curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ," so curious as to indulge a presumptuous disposition to speculate too much upon God's counsels and decrees, and so carnal as gladly to avail themselves of any cloak for their sin, may entertain such views of "the sentence of God's predestination," as, by presumption of his fixed purpose to save them, or of their inevitable reprobation, or exclusion from salvation, to give themselves no concern about working out that salvation, but rather to become hardened in indifference; and, in the latter case, to yield to "a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation." A most conclusive testimony this language of the article against the Calvinistic doctrine of reprobation!

Throughout this discourse, my respected and beloved brethren, I have endeavored to avoid that attempted prying into the secret things of God which too often accompanies discussions on such subjects. What he chooses we should know respecting his nature, attributes, counsels, operations, decrees, and will, he has revealed in his holy word; and further than that we should neither desire nor try to know. I have endeavored to treat the subject as far as the light of that word goes. If, in being governed by that, we still find some difficulties to be cleared, let us remember that there are degrees of knowledge beyond the reach of finite intellect. In a future state, the glass through which we now see darkly will be removed; knowledge, in part, will be done away; and we shall know even as also we are known.

Until we attain that state, let us be content to leave secret things to the Lord our God ; and be mainly anxious to profit by those things which are revealed and intended for us. Whatever things respecting *himself* God may be pleased to leave undisclosed, he has surely shed clear and sufficient light upon *our duty*. We have souls to be saved ; and he has taught us how we are to work out their salvation. He has chosen us, who are members of his church in Christ, out of mankind, that he may deliver us from curse and damnation, and bring us, by Christ, to everlasting salvation. This calling and election we are to make sure, and are instructed how to do so.

On these, and all other points connected with our spiritual and eternal welfare, it is wholesome counsel given us by this article, that "we must receive God's promises in such wise as they are generally set forth to us in holy Scripture," shrinking from all vain efforts to be wise above what is written, and all presumptuous endeavors to seek ingeniously wrought interpretations of the inspired word, or such as will deprive that blessed word of its general character as good tidings to all men.

"In our doings that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God ;" not seeking evasions of its plain and wholesome truths, or charging God foolishly with having a secret will running counter to that which is revealed. Thus we may hope to be kept by the power of God, through faith, unto the salvation which Christ has purchased for us.

The subject, in the present treatment of which I have drawn so largely on the attention of the respected and beloved audience around me, is not, I humbly hope, without especial interest in reference to the solemn occasion on which we are now assembled. If there is truth in the views that have been taken, the church of God is invested with an interest of the highest and holiest character. It is "the sacramental host of" His "elect," the chosen body of those who are in His own appointed way of grace and salvation. The Convention now about to be formed represents the por-

tion of that body which God has placed in this republic. The members of that Convention will be invested with the stupendous agency of carrying on God's gracious and eternally-cherished purpose towards His elect. O dear brethren : you who share with me the grievously-pressing burdens and responsibilities of the episcopate, you who, in narrower spheres, and with lessened cares and obligations, aid us in our extensive pastoral cures, and you who, in the capacities in which laics may rightly do so, would serve the church ; let none of us dismiss, for a moment, from our minds, the solemn consideration that we are here to be engaged—not in consultations for the well-being of a human organization, or in efforts ingeniously to arrive at ends of selfish, local, or party character—but in doing what in our proper sphere we may rightly do, in prosecuting the august agency with which we are honored in accomplishing God's own decree in behalf of His holy church. It is of His elect that we have the charge appertaining to our body. It is in the furtherance with which He is pleased to honor means, that we are to be agents in His great and gracious work of delivering "from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and bringing them, by Christ, to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honor."

Brethren : let not these solemn considerations be ever dismissed from our minds. In all we deliberate and all we do, be such high and holy thoughts ever with us. Be it our main anxiety that God's purpose towards His elect may, by His blessing on our prayers and labors, be thereby forwarded. Be we mainly solicitous that the cause of Christ may be stronger among us, in our personal interest therein, in our respective official connections with it, and in its general prevalence in this portion of His church, at the close than it is now at the commencement of our session. Let us, with one heart and one mind, meet at God's altar, there resolve, each for himself, that he will be the last to engender strife in this holy council, and the most solicitous and careful, as God may give him ability, to contribute to its peaceful and holy influences ; and there, in faith, penitence, and devo-



tion, seek Christ's promised sufficient grace, and His strength made perfect in the weakness of its subject. And when there we remember the faithful departed, to bless God's holy name for their pious lives and happy deaths, bear we in special mind the beloved and honored prelate,\* now resting from his labors, the mildness, sobriety, and prudence of whose counsels helped us, when last our Convention met, to deliberate on the interests of Christ's holy church. And be we thankful that we can turn from this serious loss to the higher branch of our body, and to the apostolic ranks in this western section of the church of Christ, to contemplate the happy accession of five to consecrate to the momentous duties of the episcopate, characters well approved for learning and piety, and devotion well-tested to the Master's cause.† Be it, beloved brethren, our unanimous prayer and effort that the counsels and acts of the convention being completed in the fear of God, and under the blessed influences of His Holy Spirit, we may part in peace and love, and return with renewed devotion, alacrity, and efficiency, to our respective departments of the great work of instrumentality in securing to the elect of God the everlasting salvation to which they are chosen.

\* The Right Reverend Nathaniel Bowen, D. D. Bishop of South Carolina, died August 25th, 1839.

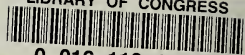
† The Right Reverend Leonidas Polk, D. D. Missionary Bishop, consecrated December 9, 1838. The Right Reverend William Heathcote De Lancey, D. D. Bishop of Western New-York, consecrated May 9, 1839. The Right Reverend Christopher Edwards Gadsden, D. D. Bishop of South Carolina, consecrated June 21, 1840. The Right Reverend William Rollinson Whittingham, D. D. Bishop of Maryland, consecrated September 17, 1840. The Right Reverend Stephen Elliott, D. D. Bishop of Georgia, consecrated February 28, 1841.

THE END.





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