

THE UNIVERSAL LOVE OF GOD AND RESPONSIBILITY OF MAN
BY JABEZ BURNS (1861)

PRELIMINARY CONVERSATION

Inquirer. I am anxious to have some conversation with you on the doctrines of the Gospel; for I feel greatly perplexed with the conflicting statements which are put forth by ministers of different denominations.

Minister. It will give me great pleasure to assist you in any way in my power; for I am always pleased when I see persons anxious to understand the great truths of religion.

Inquirer. I am much encouraged by your kind reception, for I feared you might deem me unnecessarily bold, or influenced by mere curiosity.

Minister. Christian charity would constrain me, in the absence of any proof to the contrary, to suppose that you were really solicitous to possess the truth; and, as a Christian minister, it is my vocation not only to preach the truth in public, but on every occasion to be ready to explain or illustrate those truths to serious inquirers in private. Will you, therefore, state to me the doctrines which have caused your perplexity?

Inquirer. Why, I have been greatly disturbed in my mind on the subject of Election, and I have read various works; but my difficulties seem to have increased rather than otherwise.

Minister. That is indeed a doctrine which has much agitated the Christian world, and the most learned and excellent men have held very dissimilar views thereon.

Inquirer. Do you deem it a subject at all within the range of human inquiry; or is it beyond the province of legitimate investigation?

Minister. Most assuredly it is both your privilege and duty to endeavour to understand what God has taught in the Holy Scriptures, on that, as well as on other subjects. You are aware that all Christians admit there is a doctrine of Election taught in the divine word? They differ as to the nature or characteristics of the Election itself. So that, I presume, no humble believer questions that Election is one of the doctrines of the Gospel.

Inquirer. But when I used the term Election, I intended by it, what is denominated Calvinism; in opposition to what is, I think called Arminianism.

Minister. It is much to be regretted, that either the one or the other of these terms was ever invented; the term Calvinism, however, is pretty well and accurately understood; although Calvin wrote many things which no man living can make consistent with his theological system.

For instance, he says, "Since Christ would have therefore the benefits of his death common to all men, they do Him an injury, who by their opinions debar any one from the hope of believing." As to Arminianism, I have met with few who have read the writings of Arminius; and often the most incorrect sentiments are held respecting them.

For instance, it has been generally supposed, that Calvin taught the doctrines of grace, and

Arminius, those of works, a conclusion most absolutely incorrect. The more fair statement would be, that Calvin taught the doctrine of limited grace, and Arminius the doctrine of universal grace. But it is infinitely better to ascertain what Jesus and his apostles taught, and leave both Calvin and Arminius altogether.

Inquirer. I quite agree with you in that; and as I hold the Scriptures in profound veneration, and trust that I most sincerely believe them, I had much rather that they should be the textbook of our conversation.

Minister. I rejoice to here that; and if you will labour to divest your mind, as much as possible, of all prejudice, and strive to attain a docile, prayerful, and humble spirit, we may expect that, by adhering faithfully to the divine word, we shall be led into all truth.

Inquirer. I have been greatly astonished, of late, to find ministers adopting language in the pulpit, which seems to teach contradictory views of Election. At one time, insisting that God had certainly chosen his people from all eternity to salvation; and then most earnestly inviting all men to believe, and asserting that God desired the salvation of all men; and this, more than anything else, has caused me deep anxiety. For I fear, if I had heard either opinion consistently taught, I might have been too unconcerned to have troubled with it at all.

Minister. What you say, I know is correct. Indeed, there are many writers and preachers who affirm that both limited grace, and the universal offer of salvation, are taught in the word of God. One party of this class, trying to prove that both doctrines are in harmony, while the others are satisfied with concluding, that though they do not in our fallible judgement seem to agree, yet, in God's mind, a perfect harmony exists between them.

Inquirer. But I would fain hope, for the honour as well as the efficiency of the Scriptures, that it cannot be supposed that they contradict each other.

Minister. No: I deem such remarks about the holy word of God, teaching two contrary systems, to be most derogatory to its divine author, and fearfully calculated to shake the faith of men in its inspiration altogether. I am glad, therefore, that you named that difficulty, for it will greatly help us in coming to a right judgement, if we settle distinctly the ground of final appeal. Therefore, I beg to state, that I hold the whole of the Scriptures to be God's word. Both the Old and New Testaments. That here God has given us a full and clear revelation of his will. That as the work of one holy infallible Spirit, it is all in perfect conformity with God's holy nature, and every part in entire agreement with the whole. That a right principle of interpretation will give us not only a part of the truth taught, but the whole truth, – and the whole truth in beautiful, complete agreement.

Inquirer. Then I hope we shall be so happy as to possess the true key for unlocking the treasury of God's blessed word, and thus obtaining its invaluable and precious riches.

Minister. Before we enter directly on the points which have perplexed you, may I remind you that there are several doctrines which are necessarily linked together. That Election is only one of these, and cannot be fairly viewed apart from the rest. Some years ago, I published a sermon, entitled “Scriptural Election; in harmony with General Redemption;” but I found it impossible to consider Election apart from other doctrines; and I fear, as those other doctrines were not fully explained, that the sermon was not so useful as I designed. For instance, if we would obtain clear ideas on the doctrine of Election, we must endeavour to ascertain the

meaning of Scriptural Predestination; the freedom of the Human Will, – the testimony of God's word as to the extent of the Atonement, – the nature of Faith – the work of the Holy Spirit, – and the doctrine of the Final Perseverance of the Saints.

Inquirer. You are making the subject very wide and comprehensive. But the broader the basis, the more secure probably will be the superstructure.

Minister. Why, it is only by viewing the subject in all its bearings, that we can arrive at a really satisfactory conclusion. Not that in our conversation we can take every view, or examine every objection or opinion on these questions; but we may endeavour to look at each of these doctrines as they appear to be taught in God's word, and consider them in a simple and popular manner. Indeed, I do not think that the soul-saving doctrines of the Gospel are so difficult to understand, if men do not by their creeds and mystifications render that dark, which God has designed to be the light, and thus the salvation of the world.

Inquirer. Then, I think we are now prepared to enter on these important subjects; and I hope that truth will be elicited, and that I shall be converted from a bondman of confused and conflicting notion, into a freeman of the Gospel.

Minister. May it be so, my dear friend. They whom the truth makes free, are free indeed. How beautiful and appropriate the inquirer after truth is the sublime prayer of Milton, -

What in me dark illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument I may assert Eternal providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.

CONVERSATION 1 – PREDESTINATION

Inquirer. What are we to understand by the doctrine of Predestination?

Minister. It is the determination of God's mind in reference to things to come.

Inquirer. Does God then infallibly know all future events?

Minister. Unquestionably; or he would not be an infinitely perfect Being – or able to govern the world.

Inquirer. But can nothing counteract or prevent what God has foreknown and predetermined?

Minister. No; for God's knowledge being unerring, he cannot possibly be mistaken.

Inquirer. But has God predestined everything that comes to pass?

Minister. No; for then God would have been the Author of sin, or moral evil. As the Father of lights, there can be no darkness in him, nor can moral evil possibly proceed from him.

Nay, more; if God had predestinated what we call sin, it would be no longer sin – seeing that it would be the result of God's purposes, and therefore agreeable to his mind and will. While we invariably understand sin to be utterly opposed to God's mind, and rebellion against his will.

Inquirer. How then could sin exist, if God did not predestinate it?

Minister. God resolved to permit its entrance into the universe. And thus he acted in harmony with another department of his work, in creating angels and men, responsible creatures – able to stand, or capable of falling.

Inquirer. Then is there a real distinction between God's foreknowledge and Predestination?

Minister. Certainly: for knowledge does not involve the idea of influence being exerted; but simply events being perceived and apprehended.

Inquirer. Has God predestinated or foredetermined in reference to man's final destiny, so as necessarily to include the final condition of all that will be lost, and all that will be saved?

Minister. He has; but God's predestination has invariably reference to the moral character and state of men. He has predestinated that all obstinate, impenitent sinners shall perish. That all repentant and believing sinners shall be saved.

Inquirer. But is not predestination with God absolute?

Minister. It is as absolute and irrevocable as his immutable throne and holy laws. So much so, that no incorrigible sinners will ever be saved, and no contrite believer will ever be lost.

Inquirer. But this view of predestination seems to be mixed up with conditions and contingencies.

Minister. So it is; and thus it differs from foreknowledge. For thus – when God placed our first parents in Eden, their state was one of conditions and contingency. So it was also after the fall. So also God declares in reference to Cain and Abel; Gen 4:7. So through the whole of the Scriptures in reference to every dispensation and people. As to contingency, there is none in reference to God himself, as he knows all things, and infallibly discerns the course that all men will pursue.

Inquirer. Then have we no instance in Scripture where God has predestinated men to eternal life, irrespective of character?

Minister. Not one. Such an instance would be contrary to God's holy nature. A violation of his holy government. And would shake the confidence of all holy beings as to the moral rectitude of the divine character. God essentially hates iniquity, and as essentially loves righteousness. He must therefore punish the one, and reward the other.

Inquirer. But does not the apostle speak of some persons being predestinated?

Minister. He does. In writing to the Romans, chapter 8, and verse 29. And you will observe he there states, that they were predestined “to be conformed to the image of his Son.” That is, to be holy persons. And he further states, that such predestined persons were foreknown. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate.” Thus putting his foreknowledge before his predestination. God, foreknowing their repentance and faith, determined or fore-appointed them to a holy resemblance to their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Such is the predestination of God's word – which is alike in harmony with the equity and goodness of God, and the free agency and responsibility of man.

Inquirer. Have you any other reasons in favour of that view of predestination?

Minister. Yes: for it accords with God's solemn declaration, that as he liveth, he takes no pleasure in the death of the sinner. But if he had predestinated all events, and had not acted on the grounds of the foreknowledge of character, then it must be manifest, that either God had changed, or that the declaration I have referred to in the Scriptures was not true. If sinners do perish – and God has no pleasure in it – then simply he did not foreappoint and predetermine it. But if God resolved that the impenitent should perish, and predestinated that holy – then the sinner's ruin is his own act, and it remains a truth, honourable alike to God's equity and truth, that he has no delight therein.

Moreover, predestination, as it is generally taught, is but another name for necessity; and cannot be effectually separated from the doctrine of fatalism, in which all human responsibility and agency are entirely destroyed.

Inquirer. But are you not thus reasoning because you are unable to understand it, or reconcile it with human reason; while you admit most truths on the ground that God has declared them, and not because human reason can perceive their fitness or propriety?

Minister. Predestination, as we have explained it, is easily understood. Is in perfect harmony with the justice of God. Obviously commends itself to our minds as reasonable and accountable beings. And is supported by all the weight of Scriptural authority. The other view, that God has absolutely predetermined men's destiny, and yet the asseveration that he

has no pleasure in the death of the ungodly, is indeed not so much a profound mystery, as a most palpable contradiction; and therefore in the very nature of things must be untrue. But we shall perceive the truth of this doctrine more and more, as we contemplate the other subjects before us.

Inquirer. I confess that what you have stated as to the divine foreknowledge being distinct from predestination, and also that in Scripture it precedes it, has opened quite a new moral scene before me. I begin to think, that one of the difficulties, which I previously deemed insuperable, is almost, if not entirely, removed.

Minister. I rejoice to hear it, and there no doubt, if you will humbly hearken to the divine oracles, that you will happily perceive that the divine word is never inconsistent with sound reason, and much less can it ever be opposed to man's responsibility. The next kindred subject to Predestination is the Freedom of the Human Will – in which man's free agency is absolutely and clearly established.

Inquirer. I can easily perceive that no other view of predestination will comport with what I presume is meant by the Freedom of the Will; but let us at once consider that subject in its various bearings.

Minister. That we will do, and let us think how solemn and momentous is that subject which has to do directly with our present responsibility, and final condition in the future state.

CONVERSATION 2 – THE FREEDOM OF THE HUMAN WILL

Inquirer. What is meant by the Will of man?

Minister. That power by which man determines to act.

Inquirer. What do we understand by a Free Will?

Minister. A will that can determine for or against – what is proposed to it. The opposite of a will (if the thing is not a contradiction of terms), which is under the necessity of acting, only in one given way.

Inquirer. What illustrations can you give for the better understanding this doctrine?

Minister. When we look at the physical universe, we perceive that inanimate matter is inert and unconscious; and is acted upon by physical laws, and cannot resist the influence of those laws.

We perceive that inferior creatures are governed by instinct, and are ever obedient to its laws. But man, invested with reason, has the power or faculty of choice, and can obey or disobey the moral laws when propounded to him.

Inquirer. But can man's will act independently of God's will – and in opposition to it?

Minister. Most assuredly, or there could be no sin in this world. All sin is the contravening of God's will, and disobedience to it. God's laws are the reflections of his holy, just, and good mind. Sin is the violation of these laws, and therefore must be opposed to God's mind and will.

Inquirer. But supposing our first parents to have had Freedom of Will, – has not sin destroyed that power in their depraved posterity?

Minister. If so, it has destroyed their responsibility. Now, observe; our first parents were holy, yet they had power to will evil, and did so; and thus fell from their first estate of dignity and bliss. Now, what reason have we to suppose that after the fall they did not repent, and will a humble return to God, and faith in the provided remedy for their sin? It is clear that Abel did so will, and equally clear Cain might have done so: Gen 4:2-7.

Inquirer. But is not the will always governed by the most powerful motives presented to it?

Minister. No; for if so, the motive God presented to our first parents was vastly more powerful than the one suggested by Satan. And in all cases surely the motive of eternal salvation is more powerful than the mere present pleasures of sin; and yet how men are governed by the latter, and not by the former.

Inquirer. But is it not inconsistent to suppose there to be more than one absolutely Free Will in the universe, – that of God, and that of his creatures?

Minister. Not at all – if God permits it to be so. Is it not equally inconsistent that there should be sin and holiness – evil and good? Besides, we know for certainty, that what devils and

fallen men will, is opposed to what the pure and blessed God wills; and therefore two opposite wills do exist in the universe.

Inquirer. Yes, perhaps that is true; but can the sinner will otherwise than evil?

Minister. When truth is brought to bear on his understanding and judgement, and motives presented to his conscience and affections, he evidently can.

Inquirer. What proof have you of this, unless God by his Almighty power renew his will; – in other words, make him willing?

Minister. God always addresses men as having this power. “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.” Deut 30:19. This passage is only one of a multitude of Scriptures conveying the same clear and distinct idea of the Freedom of the human Will. See Deut 11:26-28, 30:15-16, Psalm 81:13, Isaiah 48:18, Matt 23:37, John 5:40. God's commands, exhortations, entreaties, and expostulations mean nothing at all, unless man's conduct may be influenced by them. From God's essential unchanging nature he can only will holiness, as that is in perfect harmony with his nature. Devils, so far as we know, having no motives for repentance, but being justly left to the evil they made choice of, can only will evil. But man, who is still on probation, and has both evil and good presented to him, can will either. He can choose rebellion and death – or repentance and life. Hence God affectionately says, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?” Ezek 33:11. Now if God must exercise irresistibly on the mind before the sinner can turn, then the sinner is a mere machine and not a free agent; and as there is no virtue in such an act performed upon him, – so neither can there be any sin in not repenting, when the compelling power is withheld.

Inquirer. What other arguments can you advance to support the Freedom of the Will?

Minister. 1st. Man's consciousness. All men feel that they are free. Hence, there is inward self-condemnation, when evil is chosen rather than good.

2ndly. Men treat each other as free. They never allow men to plead the law of necessity for their evil conduct. All laws therefore, whether divine or human, proceed on the assumed Freedom of man's Will.

3rdly. It is this that invests the future judgement with all its solemnity. Men feel and conclude that they will then be treated as responsible persons, who could have done good, and avoided evil. And, therefore, their final condemnation and punishment will meet with the distinct assent of their own consciences.

4thly. If men are not free, then all men are just, and equally doing neither more nor less than what God has resolved they shall do. A conclusion at once subversive of all morality, accountability, and religion.

Inquirer. But does not the doctrine of Free Will invalidate the doctrine of divine grace?

Minister. Not in the least; but is in perfect agreement with it. For unless God had in his rich mercy provided for man's restoration, his condition would have been as hopeless as that of the

fallen angels. Unless God brings the truth to bear on man's mind, he can never choose between truth and error. Unless God warns and invites the sinner, he can never avoid evil nor determine on the good. The capacity to Will is conferred by God. Being placed in a state of probation, in which the Will can be exercised, is the result of God's long-suffering and forbearance towards us. So that God's glory is in nowise nor in any degree impugned by the doctrine of the Freedom of the human Will.

On the other hand, the doctrine of a necessitated Will seems alike at variance with divine equity, goodness, and moral government, and altogether opposed to man's responsible character. It is clear that, whenever the Gospel is preached, whosoever will, may hear, and hearing may understand God's mind as thus revealed. That whosoever will may repent, and turn from sin. Whosoever will may receive the pardoning mercy of God, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus, that whosoever will, need not perish, but have everlasting life.

In the last great day, God will not punish the ungodly because they *could* not – but because they *would* not come unto him, and have life.

Inquirer. I am forcibly impressed by the statements you have now made; but how is it so many great and learned men – such, for instance, as the gigantic President Edwards, and a host of others – should have held the doctrine of a necessitated Will?

Minister. That may be a very difficult question, and may equally apply to every controverted truth; for I am not aware of any doctrine connected with Christianity which cannot muster on an array of learned names, both for and against. But if you would desire to see more on this question, I advise you to read a most complete vindication of the Freedom of the Will, by Rev. A. Mahan, late President of Oberlin, United States; and a sermon by Rev. Eli Noyes, M.A., of Boston, U.S.

Inquirer. Where can I obtain them?

Minister. Why, Mahan's incomparable book has not yet been published in Great Britain, though I trust it will be ere long. It may be obtained from American booksellers in London. Mr. Noyes' lucid discourse you may obtain for a few pence of Houlston and Wright, Paternoster Row. Thoroughly investigate this subject, and make yourself master of it, and all your anxieties produced by Calvinian influences will be permanently removed. And do not forget that we must have an entirely new version of the Scriptures to harmonize with the doctrine that denies the Freedom of the Will.

But let us now proceed to the third great question, that, indeed, with which your inquiries set out, – I mean the doctrine of Election.

Inquirer. Most readily will I do that; and I now begin to see how necessary it was to take in our way the subjects we have considered.

CONVERSATION 3 – ELECTION

Inquirer. What do we understand by the doctrine of Election?

Minister. To Elect signifies to choose out, or from others, and to elevate to some privilege or blessing.

Inquirer. Is Election a doctrine of the Holy Scripture?

Minister. Clearly so; and both the Old and New Testaments are full of it.

Inquirer. Is there more than one kind of Election described in Scripture?

Minister. Why, men in Scripture are represented as being elected to various things.

Thus Abraham was elected to be the father of the Jewish nation.

Thus the Jews were elected to be God's peculiar people, and to enjoy many distinguished privileged and blessings.

Thus Jeremiah was elected to be a prophet to the Jewish people: Jer 1:5.

Thus Cyrus was elected to be the friend and deliverer of God's afflicted children: Isa 14:1-4.

Thus John was elected to be the harbinger of Christ, to prepare his way before him: Mal 3:1.

Thus Paul was elected to be an Apostle and minister of the Gentiles: Acts 9:15.

Thus also the Gentiles were elected to enjoy all the privileges of the Gospel dispensation after the Jews had rejected and put to death the Messiah. The entire Eleventh of Romans illustrates this one subject, – the casting off of the Jews through their unbelief, and the Election of the Gentiles to their forfeited privileges: See verses 15 to 20.

Inquirer: But is there not an Election or choice to salvation, as well as an Election of nations to privileges, and of persons to offices?

Minister: Decidedly so: all saints or believers are the elect, or chosen of God.

Inquirer: Does not Election imply that they have been chosen of God from all eternity?

Minister: These terms are very ambiguous. God is a being of perfect and infallible knowledge, and possesses what we often describe as foreknowledge. He therefore knows the moral state and eternal destiny of all men. And, as we said in the Chapter on Predestination, he has Elected all who repent and believe to eternal life. So that all Elect persons were foreknown of God to be such from the foundation of the world. But then personal and real Election must be God's gracious act in time, and subsequent to, or after their believing.

Inquirer: Then do you assign, as the cause of their Election, their believing in Christ?

Minister: No: properly speaking, the cause of their Election is God's love to them in Christ;

but it is always in connection with believing. Not for the merit of believing, but as inseparably united with it. For instance, – all men, while in belief, are children of wrath, even as the Ephesians were before their conversion, and *by*, not for believing, they have the power or privilege to become the sons of God: John 1:12. So also we see in Peter's first epistle, he addresses the Christian strangers, as “Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father;” that is, God foresaw their faith in the Gospel, and hence its blessed result in their Election, or being chosen of him, – and he adds, “Through the sanctification of the Spirit.” Now their sanctification was not eternal, therefore, if they were elected through that, it must have been when they became influenced by the truth of the Gospel, and, consequently, in time. Moreover, their sanctification, and their Election, and obedience, are all linked together. For the Apostle further adds, “Unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” Now this passage, carefully read and pondered, clearly shows the true nature of Election to salvation, as taught in God's holy word.

Inquirer. Then you consider faith as an essential condition of Election?

Minister. Most distinctly so. Not the originating source – for that is God's rich and uninfluenced grace. Not the meritorious cause – for that is the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus. Not the efficacious power – for that is the influence of the Holy Spirit, in and by the truth. But the connecting link by which the soul is brought into the gracious enjoyment of pardon and adoption. Christ always represented it as suspended on their believing, and with respect to which he has clearly taught, that “He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.” And again – “He that believeth hath the witness in himself (of God's favour); while he that believeth not is condemned already.”

Inquirer. But does not Christ speak of those who were especially given to him by the Father?

Minister. Truly so: and all believers are thus manifestly given to Christ. But in some of Christ's discourses, where those words are employed, he is referring to his Apostles or immediate disciples. For he says: – “Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” Again, he says – “He had lost none that the Father had given him, but the son of perdition.” Here the choice obviously refers to office, and not to salvation; unless you admit that Judas was one of the Elect to salvation.

Inquirer. But does not the Apostle fully teach unconditional Election in the eighth and ninth chapters of Romans?

Minister. Rightly interpreted, and we think that in those chapters the Apostle is teaching the very opposite doctrine. He is dwelling on the facts of God's ancient people, the Jews, being chosen and elected to all the privileges they enjoyed as God's peculiar people. That, in consequence of their unbelief and rejection of the Messiah, they had forfeited all those privileges, and were cut off. That, now God had extended the privileges and blessings of his favour to Gentile people, and that in doing so he acted in perfect keeping with his supreme majesty and untarnished equity. That he had an indisputable right to elect the Jews, and an equal right to cast them off. And therefore, of course, a right to elect the Gentiles. But observe, in each case, it was Election not to personal eternal life – but to privileges, which, if perverted or unimproved, would involve them in condemnation and punishment. For instance, how many of the Elect Jews, on account of their unbelief, perished in the wilderness! And afterwards, in various ages, suffered by the revelation of God's displeasure on account of their disobedience. And now the Apostle warns the Elect Gentiles that they must not boast, – for he

avers that they “stand by faith;” and urges that they be “not high-minded, but fear:” Rom 11:18-21.

Inquirer. But does not the Apostle refer to the unconditional Election of persons in the ninth of Romans?

Minister. He refers to Jacob and Esau – and one he says, God loved, and the other hated. By which we can only understand that he had a greater degree of love to Jacob than to Esau. For he never yet hated any of the works of his hands. He preferred and selected Jacob, in preference to Esau, to be one of the progenitors of the Messiah; and that Esau's posterity should serve or be in subjection to the posterity of Jacob. For Esau never did personally serve Jacob, nor was he ever under his authority. He did Elect, therefore, Jacob to this distinction; and it was not Rebecca's willing to the contrary – nor Esau's running and anxiety which decided the matter, but God's own immutable purpose that prevailed.

In reference to the instances of national or official Election, you will ever perceive that those elected were so for the good of others. That while God conferred great honour by the choice he made of them, yet the grand end was his merciful designs in reference to others. Thus Abraham was to be a blessing to the Jewish nation. Thus also Jeremiah, and Cyrus, and the Baptist, and Paul. Thus also the Jewish people were to be the depository of Divine truth for the advantage of the world. So that God, in selecting and blessing in an especial manner certain individuals, contemplated thereby the welfare of other members of the human family.

It will also further appear, that in carrying out the Divine plans and dispensations, it was absolutely essential that certain nations and individuals should be selected and appointed for the execution of God's holy purpose and righteous pleasure; and hence the choice God made of Abraham, Jacob, and Israel, to the accomplishment of these ends. But the acceptance and salvation of these individuals did not rest on their official Election, but on their faith in God's redeeming mercy, as connected with the coming and work of the promised Messiah. These remarks, when applied to the eighth and ninth of Romans, and as most fully developed in the tenth and eleventh chapters, raise entirely and for ever that supposed Scriptural basis, on which the limitarian system has been presumed immovably to rest. And with this key there remains not one inexplicable passage on the subject of Election in God's holy word.

Of Pharaoh it is enough to say, that God gave him the most ample means of conviction, as to his sin and rebellion; and at length gave him up to those infatuations by which his heart became obdurately hardened. Few believe that God exerted any direct influence to make wicked Pharaoh still more wicked, as this would be representing God as absolutely doing, what Satan only can tempt men to do, – the employment of his power to increase the vileness of the human heart. God did at length withdraw from Pharaoh those miracles which for a time had made him relent, and thus left him to the wicked devices of his own evil nature.

Inquirer. But does not the doctrine of absolute unconditional Election seem to be implied, where God is represented as a potter – who hath power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

Minister. God has ever done that, in conferring on some peculiar privileges and distinctions, as in all the cases we have cited of National and Official Election. But to suppose that God has made any class of mankind in order to their eternal condemnation, is most directly opposite to God's merciful nature – gracious declarations – and solemn asseverations to his

responsible creatures. If you will carefully read the corresponding passage in the prophecy of Jeremiah (18:1-17), you will see that the subject of the Potter is there illustrated by God himself, and teaches the very opposite doctrine to that of unconditional Election.

Inquirer. What more have you to add with respect to the doctrine of Election?

Minister. That the doctrine of eternal unconditional Election to salvation is productive of the following evils: –

1. It tends to perplex and confuse the mind, and renders all certainty on the subject of salvation impossible. For, without an express revelation, how are any to know that they have thus been Elected?
2. It tends to make the confident, presumptuous; and the fearful and timid, melancholy and despairing.
3. It is at variance with the plain declarations of the Gospel, which are made to all men.
4. It greatly destroys human responsibility, and appears unfavourable to personal solicitude and earnestness concerning religion.
5. It invests the Divine character with the awful charge of partiality; and
6. Seems to render the Judgement day unnecessary.

On the other hand, personal conditional Election, or the Election of character, –

1. Is in perfect harmony with the Divine attributes.
2. Is in unison with the commission to preach the glad tidings of the Gospel to all men.
3. Involves men in circumstances of individual responsibility.
4. Is favourable to personal holiness, and solemnly reiterates the address of the Apostle – “Give diligence to make your calling and Election sure.” And
5. Accords with man's responsibility and the necessity for the judgement day.

We conclude the subject, then, by again stating that Scriptural Election is God's choice of those who believe the Gospel, to all the privileges and blessings of present salvation, and to the hope of eternal life through Christ Jesus.

CONVERSATION 4 – A UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT

Inquirer. I may premise from our last conversation on the doctrine of Election, that you believe the Atonement made by the Lord Jesus Christ to be for the benefit of all men?

Minister. Fully so; and I know of no subject more distinctly and satisfactorily stated in God's holy word.

Inquirer. What distinct evidence can you adduce, fully to settle this question?

Minister. Why, we have the evidence of Prophets – of Christ himself, and of the Apostles.

Inquirer. What testimony have the Prophets given?

Minister. Isaiah, in that most affecting chapter of predictions respecting the Messiah – the 53rd, says, “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all:” verse 6. now in this passage the remedy and the disease are coextensive. The first “All” – referring to man's universal apostacy, is admitted by all evangelical Christians: the death, or bearing of sin for all men, is equally attested by the evangelical prophet. There are other prophecies where the extent of Messiah's salvation is equally the subject of holy exultation.

Inquirer. But what has the Lord Jesus Christ taught on this subject?

Minister. He everywhere represents God's love and mercy as extending to all men. He says, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” – John 3:16. See also verses 14, 15, 17, and 18. He also affirmed, that he had come to seek and to save that which was lost. Jesus also commanded the Gospel to be preached in all the world and to every creature.

Inquirer. But what have the Apostles and the other sacred writers declared on the subject?

Minister. John the Baptist directed men to “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world:” – John 1:29. And the Apostle John reiterates the universality of the Atonement in the most direct and striking language possible. He says, “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world:” – 1 John 4:14. Again, he says, “And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” – Chapter 2:2. Now, did the New Testament contain no other declaration, this last passage should be deemed sufficient; and certainly and unequivocally settles the matter.

Inquirer. But is not the term World sometimes to be understood of only a part of the human family?

Minister. I am not aware of any candid critic or theologian of repute, who in reference to the passages I have now quoted, would give them a limited signification. There are several Greek words which have been translated into our version by the word World; one of these is Oikoumenee, which is of restricted application, and is generally to be understood of only a part of the world. See illustrations of this, Matt 24:14; Luke 2:1-5; 21:26; Acts 11:28; 17:6; 19:17; 24:5; Rom 10:18; Rev 3:10; 12:9; and 16:14. But this word is never used in reference

to the love of God, or the work of Christ for the benefit of mankind. Then another word translated World is Aion, which signifies age, or duration; and is often rendered “ever.” This word also is used to distinguish the World from the church. In the former sense, it is used Matt 12:32; 13:39, 40; 24:8; 28:20; etc. In the latter sense, it is used Matt 23:22; Luke 16:8; Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 1:20; 2:6; 2 Cor 4:4; etc.

Now observe, when the Atonement is referred to, neither of these words, having a limited signification, is ever employed; but the word Kosmos, which signifies all men, or the whole World, is invariably used. Observe, this is the word rendered World in the following very emphatic places: Mark 16:15; John 1:29; 3:16, 17; 4:22; 6:33 and 51; 2 Cor 5:19; 1 Tim 1:15; 1 John 2:2; 4:14. Now in each of these passages is the work of Christ declared to be for the world, to which no limited meaning in justice to Divine truth can ever be given. We have referred you more at length to this part of our proof, because opposers often endeavour to fritter away the force of these texts, by stating that the word World does not always signify all men. By the examination of these Scriptures you may see when that remark is applicable, and when it is not.

Inquirer. But are there any other proofs of the universality of the Atonement?

Minister. Many; for not only is it affirmed by Jesus and the beloved John, but it is presented almost in every possible variety of form by the other apostles.

The apostle Paul in the epistle to the Romans – chapter 5 – clearly reasons out the question, and avers, that as extensive is the work and sacrifice of Christ – as is the extent of sin and the curse. One of the concluding verses is most emphatic: “Therefore as by the offence of one *judgement* came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the *free gift* came upon all men unto justification of life.” Chapter 5:18.

Again; he presents the same truth in a similar form, 2 Cor 5:13-31: “For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead,” verse 14. Then he says, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them,” verse 19. So also, in writing to Timothy, he declares of “God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” 1 Tim 2:3, 4. And again, he says, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time:” verses 5, 6.

And in writing to the Hebrews he states, that Christ by the “grace of God, tasted death for every man:” chapter 2:9. And in exhorting the believing Romans to Christian forbearance and self-denial, he supports his theme by the momentous argument, “Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died:” Rom 14:15.

It is sometimes urged, if Christ had atoned for all sinners, then none could perish; but here the apostle supposes a soul destroyed, for whom Christ died. So the apostle Peter speaks of false teachers “who privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them:” 2 Peter 2:1.

Now in the passages I have cited, you will perceive it is distinctly affirmed, that Christ is the Saviour of the World – propitiation for the whole world; that he has obtained justification for all – that he is the ransom for all – that he tasted death for every man; and that he died for and bought those who may be destroyed, and finally perish.

Surely no truth then is more amply confirmed than the universality of the Atonement, by the death of Christ.

Inquirer. Are there any other arguments to be advanced, in addition to the texts you have quoted?

Minister. Yes; for let it be remembered,

1. That Christ assumed our common humanity, and became the kinsman of every child of man. And in that common relationship to all men, he lived, obeyed the Divine law, and suffered for sins.
2. He has commanded the Gospel to be preached to every creature. But nothing is Gospel which does not include tidings of Christ as a Saviour. If there are those for whom Christ did not die, then for those there is no Gospel.
3. He declares believers only shall be saved, and that all unbelievers shall be damned. But if there are those for whom he did not die, then their unbelief can be no sin: for can it be a sin, that men should believe what after all is – the truth. It is clear, then, that Christ died for all, if men are finally to perish for not believing the Gospel.
4. This doctrine is in clear harmony with all the statements made in Scripture concerning God's universal love, infinite mercy, and strict impartiality. If God be compassionate to all – not desiring the death of a sinner – we might at once presume, that in sending Christ Jesus to atone for sin, he would send him to atone for all sin, and for the sins of all.

No truth is more legibly written on the pages of inspiration than the doctrine of Universal Atonement, and hence the salvability of the whole human race.

Inquirer. I confess I do not see how the force of these numerous Scriptures is to be avoided. Yet you are aware that Christ is said to have given his life a ransom for many – as well also, as it is intimated, that he gave himself for his church.

Minister. Most truly so; for the greater must of necessity include the less. If he died for all men, he inevitably died for many. If he atoned for the whole world, then of course that included the church. If a passage could be cited where it is said that he died only for many, and only for the church, then it would occasion difficulty in trying to make it harmonize with the texts I have cited; otherwise the passages alluded to do not affect our great argument at all.

Inquirer. Well, it is really cheering to discover that the holy and devoted Wesley is not declaring too much in one of his delightful hymns, where he sings, –

For all, my Lord was crucified –
For all – for all, my Saviour died.

CONVERSATION 5 – THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Inquirer. Do not many persons admit the universality of the Atonement, who still hold the doctrine of limited grace, or special salvation?

Minister. They do: hence, limitarians, or those who deny the salvability of all men, have changed their position several times within the last century and a half.

During the former period the doctrine of God's electing love and reprobating hatred were avowedly taught. But the plain unvarnished doctrine of eternal reprobation was too strong and horrid for men in general to receive, so that obnoxious part of the system was soon abandoned, and Election only insisted upon. And some went so far as to say that Election, while it secured the salvation of some, did not involve the certain destruction of the rest.

With the doctrine of Election, however, many held a limited Atonement, that is – the death of Christ for the Elect only.

But, fifty years ago, many limitarians gave up the doctrine of Christ's death for the Elect only, and began to preach that his death was sufficient and intentionally for all men. And this is the phase of moderate Calvinism in our day. But the difficulty, as it was removed from the Father's sovereign choice, to the work of the Son, so it is now removed from the atonement of the Son, to limited operations of the Holy Spirit. Hence, it is contended, that the benefits of Christ's death must be applied by the Holy Spirit – that he does this in effectually calling the Elect, and working in them by irresistible and regenerating grace. These things it was necessary to premise, before we could clearly understand the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Inquirer. It is evident from Scripture that there is a department of work in salvation, which the Holy Spirit alone can effect.

Minister. Most clearly so. One of the immediate and great benefits of the Saviour's death and resurrection, was the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Inquirer. What then are those operations which depend on the Spirit's divine influence?

Minister. We shall see this, if you will remember what the Spirit hath done already in the great scheme of our salvation. He inspired the writers of Holy Scripture, and they wrote under his infallible guidance. He formed the holy human nature of Christ in the virgin's womb. He dwelt in the Son of God in all his fullness, and by the Eternal Spirit He arose from the dead. He miraculously descended on the apostles, and invested them with extraordinary powers for the execution of their great work. Besides these things, He is sent by the Saviour to convince the world of sin and of righteousness, and of a judgement to come. He alone can renew and regenerate the soul, and give spiritual life. He is given also to attest the Sonship of believers, to dwell in their hearts, as their guide, comforter, and sanctifier, and by his gracious influences to make them meet for eternal glory.

Inquirer. Most important and essential, then, is the Work of the Holy Spirit. But does the Spirit work independently of man's volitions and co-operation; doe he work irresistibly, or in harmony with man's faculties?

Minister. It is clear that if the Holy Spirit simply operates by the attribute of power, that no created mind can resist his influences. In which case, human accountability would be utterly out of the question. But if he operates by the *truth*, and by *moral suasion* – then man's free agency is unaffected. The Holy Scriptures contain the ideas and thoughts of the Spirit of God, and by these he conveys light to the understanding – truth to the judgement, motive to the will, and conviction to the conscience. Hence, in order to the salvation of men – in addition to Christ's work – it is essential that Gospel truth be presented to the mind. Now saving truth is contained in the inspired volume, and is thus conveyed by the Christian preacher to those who hear it. By divine truth thus conveyed to the mind, God's Holy Spirit enlightens, convinces, and renews the heart. See Rom 10:13-17.

Inquirer. But does not the Holy Spirit operate immediately and directly without the Scriptures?

Minister. He may do so; but this we should deem an *extraordinary operation* of the Spirit. The ordinary operations of the Spirit are evidently by and with the truth. For instance: Christ says, that when the Holy Spirit should come – “He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and show it unto you,” John 16:14. So in reference to the regeneration of the soul, the apostle James says, “Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth,” 1:18. So Peter says, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which abideth for ever,” 1 Peter 1:23. So we add also as to sanctification. Jesus prays, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth,” John 17:17. So the apostle Paul, speaking of Christ's love to the church, remarks he “gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,” Eph 5:24-25. It is also observable that all the work of grace attributable to the Holy Spirit is also ascribed to the divine word. See this extensively illustrated in the 19th and 119th Psalms. Now we are not to conclude then that the word of God, separate from the Holy Spirit, nor the Holy Spirit separate from the word, operates on the human heart. But the Holy Spirit *by*, and *in*, and *with* the word, graciously enlightens, influences, and converts, and sanctifies the soul.

Now this view delivers us from all the abstruse mystification, as well as from all the arbitrary and irresistible notions which have been so usually identified with the Holy Spirit's work.

He has to do with men who are free moral accountable agents. He has prepared, adapted efficient truth, for the salvation of men. He has now come into the world to supply the place of Christ's personal presence, as the great gift of the Lord Jesus, and he carries on his saving glorious work by bringing the truth to bear on the minds and hearts of men, in the belief and reception of which the Gospel becomes the power of God unto salvation.

Inquirer. Then when the truth is thus presented to the mind, can men resist these operations of the Holy Spirit?

Minister. Most certainly. For Stephen declares with his dying breath, in reference to the unbelieving Jews, “Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye,” Acts 7:51. So we are exhorted not to “Grieve the Holy Spirit:” not to “Quench the Spirit.” See also Heb 3:7-19.

Besides, if the Holy Spirit cannot be resisted, then all on whom he operates must be saved: and those on whom he does not operate must necessarily perish, because his essential irresistible influences are withheld. All distinctions about effectual calling, and the Holy

Spirit's common and special influences, are not only entirely wanting in the Scriptures, but they do not remove the difficulty one jot or tittle. For after all it must come to this, that where irresistible influence is employed the sinner *must* be saved, and where it is not employed the sinner *cannot*: – a doctrine at complete variance with the revealed universal love of God to a perishing world, and the individual responsibility of man.

Inquirer. This part of the subject seems to be one of peculiar difficulty. For I had ever concluded that there must be some power or influence, in addition to that which the truth contains, to convert the soul.

Minister. No doubt that idea generally prevails. But have we not a striking analogy in nature. All the essential blessings of life proceed from the hands of our heavenly Father. The air we breathe, the bread we eat, and every other blessing. But they are all conveyed to us through pre-arranged and settled laws by which the world is governed. And God, therefore, does not send any of these mercies immediately, but in harmony with previous wise arrangements, adapted to secure to us these blessings. Now, as sin entered into the world by Satan's lie, and the belief of this lie brought guilt and defilement and condemnation on our first parents, so God resolved, in mercy, to send his Son into the world, to restore men to holiness and bliss. And by the truth, concerning his love, and the work of the Lord Jesus, he saves men from the destructive error of sin. This truth the Holy Spirit has revealed to us in the word, and this truth is fully adapted to enlighten – to convince – and to convert. It is adapted to man's state and condition everywhere. It contains a perfect remedy for man's malady, and only requires to be brought to bear on the human mind, and to be believed, to secure to the soul thus receiving it life and salvation. The Holy Spirit, infinitely wise, originally provided a distinct and efficient means for man's recovery, and does not require in any age or to any man, to superadd anything else to make it efficient.

Besides, if the Spirit is to append anything to the Gospel, or connect anything with it in the way of abstract influence, we should have been informed of this, and told how to secure it. A subject of all others, most important for us to know, and yet on which the Scriptures are utterly silent. Such a view of superadded influence is essential to the partial and limited scheme of eternal unconditional Election; but utterly incompatible with the freeness and efficiency of the Gospel.

Inquirer. But how often is the very truth of the Gospel preached with earnestness and power, and yet it fails to convert. And how often, while a few are savingly influenced, yet, in the same congregation, the many are entirely unaffected.

Minister. Most truly; and it becomes us to ascertain what makes this momentous difference. If God imparts to the few what he withholds from the many, then the latter surely ought to be more pitied than blamed. We are not at any time responsible for the right exercise of what is not imparted. It is impossible, on this ground, to see where the cause of unbelief and non-improvement is to be laid, except with God himself, a conclusion most horrible indeed! But if this difference is to be traced to the voluntary emotions or exercises of the hearers – as it is in the parable of the sower – then the impartiality of Jehovah, the efficiency of the truth, and the responsibility of men, are all seen in harmony together.

Inquirer. Then, if I understand you, you believe that when divine truth is brought to men, that it is not effectual to their salvation through their inattention, inconsideration, love of the world, unwillingness to part with sin, or general unbelief?

Minister. Yes; and this is what God himself complains of, – he says, men will not hear, that they will not consider; that they prefer darkness to light. That on account of their desire for the praises of men, unwillingness to take up the cross, and yield themselves to his service, that they are not saved. Have we any reason to believe that the “certain men” who clave unto Paul when preaching at Athens, with Dionysius and Damaris, believed because of some superadded influence; while the rest mocked because that influence was withheld? Or rather was it not in the one case they heard with attention and candour, and hence with faith; while the others allowed their prejudices to darken their minds, and harden their hearts against the truths delivered?

The connecting link of the Spirit's work and the sinner's salvation, will more clearly appear in our next Conversation.

CONVERSATION 6 – FAITH

Inquirer. We have seen how the Holy Spirit – by the truth – operates on the mind; but what is it which renders that operation efficient?

Minister. Faith; or the belief of the truth presented. Hence, Jesus always demanded the faith of his hearers; and by faith they became his disciples. By unbelief they excluded themselves from his saving blessings. Their faith, he ever averred, thus saved them; and for their unbelief he invariably condemned them. To see these observations fully established, read carefully the following instances which occurred in the ministry of the Saviour: Matt 9:28, 29; Mark 5:36; 9:23; 11:24; 16:15, 16; John 4:39-42; 6:29 and 69; 9:35; 11:40; 19:35. So it is said, on one occasion, that Christ “could not do many mighty works, because of their unbelief:” Matt 18:58. And again, that he “marvelled, because of their unbelief:” Mark 6:6. And he upbraided his disciples on account of their unbelief: Mark 16:14.

The apostles thus imitated their divine Lord, and demanded the faith of those to whom they preached the Gospel.

Inquirer. But is not faith the gift of God?

Minister. The power of believing is, that those faculties by which we can understand the truth, and decide on evidence presented to our minds, are the gifts of God. For reason, judgement, and the will have been given us of God. Just as sight or hearing is the gift of God.

Inquirer. But is it not specially the gift of God? Is it not a power which must be imparted when the truth is presented?

Minister. By no means. If so, Jesus would have taught this to his disciples and to the people. He would assuredly have said, You must believe my truths if they are to save you; yet you cannot believe without special help, and therefore seek faith or power to believe from God, who can alone impart it. Now all this was essential to the full instruction of the people, and absolutely necessary, if faith be the special gift of God. Instead of which, the Saviour never even defined faith at all, but always treated men, as not only knowing what faith was, but as being conscious they could exercise it if they would. In believing, the work of God and the actings of the human faculties are both essential. God must present truth to the mind, – the mind must have the power of understanding, and judging, and deciding, which all sane mature minds possess as endowments from him. And with this power man must hear or read the truth presented. He must consider, and weight, and ponder it. He must determine in reference to it; and in doing this, he can admit or reject – believe or refuse his faith to the subjects thus brought before him.

Inquirer. But have you any other evidence that men have the power to believe?

Minister. I add,

1. God demands it, and he demands nothing out of our power.
2. He connects it with salvation.
3. He condemns the unbeliever.
4. He affirms that “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;” Rom 10:17. Read also the apostle's previous reasonings, from verse 6th to the 11th.

5. He also appeals to our consciousness on the subject. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater:" 1 John 5:9.

Then may we not safely conclude the power of faith is from God – the act of faith is of man. As we have said sight is the gift of God, yet, seeing is the act of man. As God gives us daily bread, yet man must plough, sow, and reap, and prepare it for his use, and then receive it for the purpose of nutrition. So by faith we receive the engrafted word which is able to save our souls. Allow me to add, that faith is described as beholding Christ. Looking to Jesus. Asking of him. Receive him. Building on him. Coming to him. Feeding on him as the bread of life. Receive the testimony concerning him, and the record God hath given of him.

Now, as all men to whom the Gospel comes are bound to believe it, and cannot be saved without it, we reasonably conclude, that when the truth is testified, every sane mind can believe or reject it.

Thus by the belief of the truth, which the Holy Spirit presents to the mind, it becomes effectual to the conviction of sin, to true repentance, to genuine conversion, to the renewal of the heart, and to the sanctification and building up of the soul in the knowledge and in the love of God. I only add, that in proportion to the power of our faith, will be the excitement of our emotions and the holy energy of our lives. Strong faith will produce intense love, burning zeal, decision of character, and devotedness of life. While weak or wavering faith will produce languor, vacillation, and irregularity of moral conduct.

Faith works by love, and purifies the heart. And when strong in faith, we give glory to God. According to our faith do we receive of the blessings we ask in prayer, and enjoy the holy, cheering influences of the Divine Spirit. In all respects, and in all things, Jesus says to us, – "Be it unto you according to your faith."

Inquirer. If I could clearly see that your views of faith were correct, I think I should conclude my deliverance from theological bondage was complete. But can it be that the mere belief of the truth can work so entire a change in the heart, and character, and life of man?

Minister. Why, it is not, as I have said already, the mere act of faith that does it, but it is the power of God's Holy Spirit, which is received into the soul by faith. It is the glorious and invincible truth of the Gospel, which is believed, which is the power of God to salvation. And do we not see in every-day life men doing the most remarkable things under the influence of natural or human faith? I mean, faith on human testimony. A man hears or reads of a delightful land thousands of miles from the country of his birth, where his pecuniary position will be improved, and exercising faith in the report, he breaks up all the associations of his native home, leaves all his friends, severs the most endearing associations, crosses the dangerous sea, and runs ten thousand risks to realize the benefits he believingly anticipates. If men will do all this as the result of faith in human testimony, how much more may we expect, when men hear and believe the glorious tidings of the Gospel, in which life and immortality are brought to light, and eternal salvation revealed. Yes, they will yield their entire selves to God, and live and conflict for the Crown of glory that fadeth not away. Especially when they perceive that the godliness proposed in the Divine word, is profitable unto this life, as well as unto the life which is to come.

The great marvel is, not that men should believe, and believing should count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; but that any should by their unbelief put

away from them the blessings of so great a salvation.

I think what I have said will assist you to perceive not only that faith in the Gospel is a duty, but also that it must be productive of the most signal and blessed effects.

Inquirer. Well, I think that the scales are beginning to fall from mine eyes, especially as you attach no merit to faith; nor yet render the operations of the Holy Spirit unnecessary.

Minister. Faith is the withered hand stretched out at the Saviour's bidding. The eye of the diseased and perishing looking to the appointed remedy. The guilty soul resting on Jesus' infinite and precious sacrifice. It finds all the merit in the blood of the atonement, and all the efficiency in the power of the Holy Spirit's truth. But it is that act of the mind which brings us into gracious and saving contact with both, and without which the work of Jesus and the operations of the Spirit will be of none effect to our souls. The Christian never trusts in his faith, but in the Saviour – never boasts of believing, but of the preciousness of that salvation, which faith recognizes and appropriates in the Gospel, and gives all the grateful ascriptions of praise to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is faith which exalts grace, and at once condemns self-righteousness altogether. If of faith, then it is no longer of works. If of grace, then not of human merit. So that faith humbles the believer, and exalts the Saviour. It annihilates self, and crowns the Messiah our Prophet, Priest, and King, – yea, “Lord of all.”

CONVERSATION 7 – THE FINAL PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Inquirer. What is the definite meaning attached to the doctrine of the Final Perseverance of the Saints?

Minister. The signification is this: that all who are really saints, that is, have become regenerated persons, can never finally fall away. They may fall into sin – open, flagrant sin, – but they will assuredly be restored, and ultimately saved.

Inquirer. And on what grounds does this doctrine rest?

Minister. Why, it is the last link but one in the Predestinarian chain, and one essential part of that system. Predestination or Election is the first link. Atonement for the Elect is third. Effectual Calling is fourth; and the last, certain Glorification.

Now, if the Predestinarian scheme be true, then of course so is the doctrine of Final Perseverance – though there are those who profess to believe this doctrine, irrespective of its apparent connection with unconditional Election, etc.

Inquirer. What do the Scriptures reveal on this subject?

Minister. They teach us, that all saints may and can persevere. That there is grace sufficient to ensure this. That God's love to those who reflect his holy likeness, never alters; and that his gifts are without repentance. But they teach as clearly, that saints can only persevere by the continued use of divinely appointed means. That the holiest of saints are frail and may fall away, and thus imperil their final salvation.

Inquirer. Will you adduce those portions of the word of God that teach the possibility of saints thus falling away?

Minister. Observe, many of the Divine promises are made with this implied contingency. I will adduce one or two of this class. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life:” Rev 2:10. So also Jesus says; “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved:” Matt 24:13. Then the numerous EXHORTATIONS AND CAUTIONS on the subject. Hence believers are exhorted to “hold fast their hope:” “to hold fast their confidence;” and to “hold fast the profession of their faith, without wavering, to the end.” So they are cautioned against “a heart of unbelief;” against “the deceitfulness of sin;” and the ruinous apostasy of the Israelites in the wilderness is adduced, to give these cautions all possible effect, lest they also should fall after the same example of unbelief. See Heb 3:7 to 19. And this subject is presented in a very solemn and powerful manner in the same epistle; chapter 4, verses 1 to 12.

Inquirer. Have you any examples presented in Scripture on this subject?

Minister. There are several. Besides those of the Elect Israelites in the wilderness, who were excluded from God's rest – the land of Canaan – for their unbelief, the apostle Paul refers to Hymenaeus and Alexander, who are said to have made shipwreck of their faith, and whom the Apostle had delivered unto Satan, that they might not learn to blaspheme: 1 Tim 1:19-20. He also refers to Hymenaeus and Philetus, “who had erred from the truth,” and “overthrown the faith of some” 2 Tim 2:16, 17, 18. So he distinctly avers, that in the last days some should err or depart from the faith: 2 Thess 2:3. The apostle Peter is most distinct, when he says, “For it

had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb: The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire:" 2 Peter 2:20 to 22. I only add to this decisive passage, God's solemn declaration, as delivered by the prophet, and as equal the will of an unchanging God, as it was 2,400 years ago: "When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it."

And again: "When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby:" Ezek 33:13, 18.

On this very principle, Jesus said to the impotent man, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee:" John 5:14. The figurative declared possibility of that light becoming darkness, and the salt losing its savour; teach most unequivocally the same truth: Matt 5:13.

This the poet has forcibly paraphrased: –

Ah! Lord, with trembling I confess –
A gracious soul may fall from grace;
The salt may lose its seasoning power,
And never, never find it more.

Lest that my fearful case should be,
Each moment knit my soul to Thee;
And lead me to the mount above,
Through the low value of humble love.

Inquirer. But how can you consistently explain those numerous passages which appear to teach the certain salvation of the believer?

Minister. Promises are made to character, and are ever contingent on certain Divine conditions. So that the character and the promise go together. But if the character is lost, then the promise is null and void. Therefore there is no changableness in God; no uncertainty in him; no failure of his word. He has engaged to give sufficient grace to all his people who believe in him, and live to him; if they depart from him and neglect his grace, *they necessarily deprive themselves* of the blessings to which they had previously been called.

Inquirer. But is it not absolutely said, that "He that believeth shall be saved"?

Minister. So every believer is really now saved from the guilt, condemnation, power, and curse of sin. But is it not also said, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him"? Heb 10:38. And that the branch *in* Christ, that beareth not fruit, he taketh away. And if any man abide not in Christ, "he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned:" John 15:1-6.

And if inspired, miraculously converted apostle Paul expresses his most intense anxiety, and resolves "so to run, not as uncertainly; so to fight, not as one that beateth the air; but to keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, after he had preached the Gospel to others, he should be a castaway" (1 Cor 9:26, 27), how solemnly needful is it, that we should give all diligence to make our calling and Election sure.

CONCLUDING CONVERSATION

Inquirer. I very much rejoice that we have thus been enabled to take an extended view of the doctrine of Election, and the other subjects necessarily connected with it. Would it be possible to have the whole brought into a very condensed and clear form, that we might now survey the whole as a compact and harmonious system?

Minister. I think it may be done; at any rate, we can make the attempt. Before all worlds the blessed and true God existed, possessed of every possible attribute and perfection. In his infinite mind all things were comprehended. He had perfect and infallible knowledge of all future events. He foreknew all things; through all time, and through all eternity. He clearly discerned all events in their order, causes and effects. He clearly foresaw that some of the holy intelligences he had resolved to create, and to create mutable beings, would rebel against his holy authority; and he resolved to permit the entrance of the universe. With that permission he also resolved, for his own glory, and the eternal well-being of his creatures, to execute a purpose of mercy on behalf of apostate men, and by sending his own Son as a Redeemer, to render it consistent with all his pure and righteous perfections to pardon the sinner, and to restore him to his favour and family. He resolved that faith in his Son should be the grand connective link between the perish sinner and the salvation he had provided. And he furthermore predestinated and elected to eternal life all such sinners whom he thus foreknew, as believing in his Son Jesus Christ, and who should continue faithfully in well-doing unto death. He predetermined that such sinners as persisted not only in sin, but unbelieving rejected the provisions of his grace and mercy, should be finally condemned and perish. To render this great scheme of mercy effective, the holy and eternal Spirit inspired men to write his will and purposes concerning mankind, and to present in these Scriptures the facts and principles and motives of the Gospel. And by his providence he resolved to preserve this sacred volume of revealed truth, that men might know his gracious will; and also he foreappointed that men should be called and qualified, and sent forth on this embassy of mercy, to proclaim unto mankind the glad tidings of salvation.

As the fruit of the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Redeemer, he graciously purposed to send the Holy Spirit into the world, by whose blessed agency the Gospel should be brought to the minds and hearts of sinners, so that if they neglected or despised the truth, they should be without excuse. For those who believed in the Saviour he provided rich stores of grace to sanctify their nature, to sustain their faith and hope, and to supply all their need, and to keep them unto eternal life. Yet God, in all his purposes, ever resolved to treat man as a being of reasonable powers, endowed with understanding, judgment, and will, and thus responsible for the principles and actions by which his life should be characterized. In all this God exhibited his sovereign will and Divine pleasure, displaying in glorious characters both his holy impartiality, and infinite love and mercy to our race.

Inquirer. This comprehensive and simple view of these great truths greatly comforts my mind. How delightful to realize in God a Being of infinite, unfailing mercy. One who takes no delight, much less foreappoints, the eternal ruin of his creatures. What a glorious Saviour Jesus appears, having by his atoning work removed every impediment out of the way of a world's salvation, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of them who believe. What a blessed system is the Gospel, which brings the tidings of salvation to all men, and which is effectual to the salvation of all who believe it.

How sublime this view of the Divine Spirit, who treats men as reasonable, accountable beings, and who, while he presents the most glorious truths to the mind and heart, and urges the most weighty motives, yet leaves men to act on their own responsibility, either to believe or reject the testimony of the Gospel. Here is nothing merely arbitrary in the Divine government – nothing contradictory in the plan of redemption, and nothing obscure as to the way of a sinner's pardon and final salvation. It is indeed one beautiful whole, where there is no reason for despondency on the one hand, nor ground of presumption on the other. A system of truth and grace – of holiness and mercy – of Divine love and human responsibility. I feel constrained to apply to it the beautiful lines of Dr. Watts, –

What if I trace the globe around,
And search from Britain to Japan!
There shall be no religion found,
So just to God, so safe to man.

Minister. I am glad to hear that these views of the Gospel should have removed your doubts, and given you real satisfaction of soul. I need not add that however much pleasure you may feel in perceiving the loveliness of Gospel doctrines, and their blessed harmony with each other, and their adaptation to all men, yet it is only by personal faith that these rich and exhaustless treasures of grace and glory become ours.

Inquirer. I indeed feel that most deeply; but how blessed it is to know and understand the truths by which we can be saved. How miserable to be in doubt and perplexity, a prey to views which are essentially discordant with one another. I devoutly pray that the knowledge of the truth may make me free indeed, and fill my heart with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Minister. My soul says “Amen” to your appropriate prayer; and may you thus feel and enjoy the love of the Father, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, with all the believing people of God evermore.

Inquirer. I trust that will be my experience, and that I shall not only have a good hope through grace, but be able to give a reason for that hope to those who may require it, with meekness and fear.

Minister. Farewell, dear friend; hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering to the end. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Be clothed with humility. Let patience have its perfect work. Cherish lowly views of yourself, – lofty and glorious conceptions of the Saviour. Rely on the certainty of his word, the efficacy of his grace, and the sanctifying power and guiding influences of the blessed Spirit; and live in the earnest expectation of finally receiving the end of your faith, even the eternal salvation of your soul.

And now, reader, guided by the Divine Word into all saving truth, may you realize the love of God towards you, – feel the efficacy of the atoning blood of the Cross, – enjoy the comforting and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, – live a life of faith in the Son of God; and having endured with gracious constancy to the end, receive from the hands of the Chief Shepherd the Crown of Glory that fadeth not away. AMEN!

SUMMARY TO THE NEW EDITION

A Brief Statement and Survey of the various Doctrines, as exhibited in the Conversations; showing their direct difference, wherein they do not differ, and their contradiction of the Word of God.

Of the various classes of Calvinian advocates, some take what is called the extreme view, and carry out their principles to their utmost legitimate extent. These are, in my opinion, most wrongfully called Hyper.

Ness, Dr. Twiss, Coles, Crisp, and many of the leading writers of a century-and-a-half and upwards ago, clearly belonged to this school. The moderate and modern class of Calvinists may teach what appears more reasonable, and more in conformity with large portions of the sacred Scriptures, but certainly not what is more logically and philosophically in harmony with the Calvinian system. Beyond all controversy, Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism have in their particular systems nothing in common. They are directly opposed to each other, and there can be no reconciliation of the two: the one or the other is therefore necessarily erroneous.

Notice – I. WHEREIN THE TWO SYSTEMS DIFFER.

The one limits the mercy of God to a part of human family, the other extends it to all men. The one makes the Divine decree to precede the Divine foreknowledge, the other makes Divine prescience to take in human conduct, and on the ground of that conduct fixes the predestinating acts of God: Rom 8:29.

The one affirms that God only wills the salvation of the few, the other that he wills the salvation of all men.

The one exhibits God sending his Son to die for the predestinated Elect, the other averts that God sent his Son to be the ransom for all.

The one says that the real call of the Gospel is for the Elect only, the other that the Gospel call is to every sinner.

The one represents the abstract influence of the Divine Spirit, as essential to the operation of saving faith; the other that Divine truth, when presented to the mind, is ever accompanied by a sufficient power to produce conviction and a belief thereof.

The one represents the chosen of God to be so, anterior to their faith, the other as following belief.

The one makes men passive in the changes wrought by the grace of God in the soul, the other makes men active, and co-working by and with God, in the reception of his saving blessings.

The one would appear, therefore, to reduce human agency to an indefinite shadow, the other makes it a most important substance, and the reasonable ground of responsibility.

The one therefore necessarily, in this view, makes the final perseverance of the Elect certain and infallible; the other, recognizing free human agency, declares it is only those who

continue in the grace of God that shall be finally saved.

II. OBSERVE, THE DIFFERENCES OF THE TWO SYSTEMS ARE NOT WHAT THEY ARE OFTEN REPRESENTED TO BE.

For instance, it is *not* a difference as to God's sovereignty, for both systems include this; but General Redemptionists consider the Divine sovereignty in harmony with God's infinite mercy and grace. Nor is it a difference as to God's infallible knowledge of the destiny of all men, for that is equally held by both; nor is it a difference as to God being the SOURCE OF ALL GOOD TO MANKIND, for both clearly take in that; nor is it a difference as to salvation being entirely of grace, for both teach that – one, however, limiting it, the other pleading for its universality.

Nor is it a difference as to Divine operations on the heart in order to its renewal; but the difference is as to the kind of operation, whether it be absolute and irresistible, or persuasive and resistible.

It is not a difference as to the glory of SALVATION BELONGING ENTIRELY TO GOD, but rather whether it be glory belong to an arbitrary Deity, or the glory of an infinitely loving and merciful Jehovah.

It is not a difference as to the final salvation of a portion, or of all men, for both systems teach the ultimate condemnation of unbelievers; but it is a difference as to unbelief being the necessary result of withholden grace, or the positive result of personal wilful rejection of the truth.

It is *not* a difference as to salvation by grace or works, but as to God's grace being receive or rejected, co-operated with, or contemned.

Nor is it a difference as to HUMAN MERIT or NON-MERIT; for both systems teach the sinfulness, guilt, and condemnation of all men, with whom there can be nothing good or meritorious in itself. But there may be conditions of Divine appointment, as in repentance and faith being pre-requisite to the enjoyment of pardon and salvation, as taught most explicitly by our Lord, and also in Acts 2:28; 3:19. The compliance with a Divine appointment, as the Israelites looking to the brazen serpent, implied no merit, and yet it was a condition essential to the healing of those bitten by the fiery serpents: so are repentance and faith thus essential, but in no way of merit in those who exercise them. It may be essential to the lief of a drowning man to lay hold of the rope thrown out to him, and to hold it fast; but the idea of merit in it, is absurdity itself.

Having thus, in the way of summary or recapitulation, shown first, wherein the two systems differ, and also, secondly, wherein the difference does not exist, we shall endeavour -

III. TO SHOW WHERE IN THE LIMITARIAN SCHEME THROUGHOUT APPEARS TO BE IN ANTAGONISM TO THE WORD OF GOD.

We premise by stating that the eternal unconditional election of some to certain salvation necessarily involves the perdition of all who are not thus elected.

1. This eternal election is, according to Calvinism, the result of God's absolute and sovereign will; that will is, therefore, that only the elected few should be saved. So that the mercy thus exercised is limited, and not universal; but the Scripture declare that even "His tender mercies are over all his works," and that he "wills not the death of the wicked," Psa 145:9.
2. As the result of God's determination to bring only a part of mankind within the possibility of salvation, for these only did he send his Son to die and bear their sins; but the Scripture in every possible form of speech declare that God sent his Son to die for the "world", for the "whole world," "for all", and for "every man."
3. The limitarian scheme declares that only those elected and atoned for by Jesus are called to the enjoyment of the blessings of salvation; or that the general call the Gospel proclaims is utterly nugatory, and useless, without an inward, efficient, and irresistible call being appended thereto. But this distinction of calls is a mere human dogma, for God when he calls is never insincere, but really means that men should be obedient to it; and he places the condemnation and ruin of men at their own door, for refusing his calls, and not concurring in his express will to save them, Prov 1:24; Luke 13:34. If men cannot obey the Divine call to repentance and faith, then that at least is their misfortune and misery, and not surely a sin deserving everlasting wrath.
4. The Divine Spirit, say the rejectors of general redemption, only savingly operates on the Elect, and without those operations the benefits of Christ's death cannot be applied or received. If so, then sinners left out of the scheme of mercy never do resist the Holy Ghost, as he never truly strives with them. Thus, the declaration of Psa 95:7, 8, and reiterated in Heb 3:15, are utterly inexplicable, and all cautions against such sin must really go for nothing.
5. If the doctrines we have been examining are correct, faith is the necessary result of spiritual irresistible operation, so that without that, faith is a sheer impossibility. But the Scriptures call on all who hear the Gospel to believe, as faith cometh by hearing, Rom 10:17, and declare that unbelief is a heinous, soul-destroying sin, for he that "believeth not shall be damned." The irreconcilability of these sentiments is most manifest. Shall we allow Christ and the apostles, then, to decide this question, or shall we bow to mere human teaching and authority?

From the whole, we feel constrained by the revealed will of God, as expressed in his word, to believe that God, as benevolent and merciful, does not hate even his apostate children, but in compassion has yearned over their sinful and miserable condition, and from the loving emotions of his own nature has contemplated and purposed means for their possible restoration to holiness and eternal life.

That as the Universal Parent of mankind, his mercy and grace have reached to all and passed by none.

That the provisions of grace, as manifested in the Lord Jesus, were as extensive as the sin and misery of all men.

That the tender of this mercy is made to men as free and accountable beings, and that all are treated with as such.

And, therefore, that while men have no power to recover themselves from sin and misery, they may accept of God's grace, and be thus delivered from sin and death; that on the other

hand they may reject, and thus deprive themselves of, the blessings infinite mercy has provided for them.

That in the one case the salvation of believers is owing only to the rich mercy and grace of God, and on the other hand the ruin of sinners is clearly self-procured, and the honour of God's impartiality and infinite love manifestly vindicated.

That God did not eternally prepare a place of torment for those without the pale of his mercy, but that sinful men by their impenitence and unbelief prepare themselves for that state of punishment "prepared for the devil and his angels," Matt 25:41.

Christ's universal teaching, the preaching and teaching of the apostles as recorded in the Scriptures, the writings of the earliest Fathers of the Christian Church as they have come down to us, know nothing of that decretal system which represents God as leaving out of his scheme of mercy, passing by in his calls of grace, and then punishing those he willed never to redeem, with everlasting torments. Reason and conscience appear to us outraged by such a system, and the glory of God enshrined in blackness for ever.

The Scriptures exhibit God as rich in mercy, delighting in mercy, and as longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, and only unchangeable in his purpose to punish the obstinately unrepentant and unbelieving transgressor.

The most magnificent aphorism ever uttered, or heard by men, is that repeated by the apostle John, – "GOD IS LOVE," 1 John 4:8, 16.

Love eternal, infinite
Unchanging, evermore,
Spread over all His works and ways: –
My soul, this love adore!