

Bethel

Pulpit

Sacred Truths of the Gospel

Sermon Number 457

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B.A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 11th September, 2022**

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

I have sometimes thought that if you were asked briefly in a word to say what Strict Baptists believe in their chapels, you could not do better than to refer them to these two verses, because there is every doctrine of the gospel, one after another, set up. It begins in eternity past; it ends in eternity to come. Really, it is like a chain of golden links, or if you will, a chain of precious pearls. Every one of these sacred truths in themselves is precious, important, vital. But what are they when they are all joined together!

But beloved friends, the most blessed thing this evening would be if *any of you* were sweetly led by the Holy Spirit into a personal interest, savingly, of any of these vital truths, or all of them, to the glory of God, to your soul's eternal happiness. So it is really like a little body of divinity. Dr. Gill's mammoth work – I do not know how large, how many pages – *A Body of Divinity*. This is a body of divinity set forth in the simplest of terms and in so few words.

"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord." Did you notice when we read the chapter how suddenly and perhaps unexpectedly these verses come in? There are some terrible things have been going on before. Surely you do not read these things unmoved. They almost shake you; they almost make you tremble – the man of sin, the deceiving of the nations, and then how it all ended up – it is enough to make each one of us tremble. O "can we bear that piercing thought" if these solemn words belong to us: "That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness"? What a dark, black background it is to these wonderful verses. O but the wonderful thing is this: that everyone who has a saving, eternal interest in these two verse I have just read to you, by nature deserves an interest in this

awful condemnation that goes before. We deserve what goes before; we do not deserve what follows after. What follows after is all according to the riches of His grace from first to last.

“That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. *But.*” What a lovely beginning that is: “But”! There is something different, something better, something for the Lord’s dear people. How lovingly Paul writes about them. People talk about dry doctrine. There is nothing dry about the doctrines here. There is nothing dry about the Apostle Paul’s salutation – the love that flowed from his heart and the love that was flowing from their hearts in return. How we have treasured that word over the years:

“Love is the golden chain that binds
The happy souls above;
And he’s an heir of heaven that finds
His bosom glow with love.”

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord.” That is the way the apostle greets them, these saints in Thessalonica. He knew they were not just beloved by him, but they were the “beloved of the Lord.” That is a blessed description of God’s people: the “beloved of the Lord.” If there is one attractive word in those blessings of the twelve tribes we have early on in the Old Testament, perhaps Benjamin’s blessing is the sweetest: “The beloved of the Lord.” May some of you know it and feel it. “The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders.”

“Brethren beloved of the Lord.” I could not help during the interval thinking of old Mr. Gascoigne and his quaint way of preaching. If he had one of these sacred truths to bring forward, he would suddenly stop and pause, and he would turn round and look. He would say, “Come into the witness box,” and he would mention someone by name – one of the hymnwriters, one of the apostles – and then he would quote it. I could just see Mr. Gascoigne speaking of this wonderful love, “beloved of the Lord,” and suddenly turning right round in the pulpit and saying, “John Kent, what do you think? What have you got to say about the love of Christ? Come into the witness box, John. ‘Loved with an everlasting love.’ Thank you, John; thank you, John.” I am sure you young people would have been

fascinated with him. But there was nothing light. The old people when I was a boy said, “You go and hear Gascoigne, and before you go home, you will have been sent either to heaven or to hell.” It would be a wonderful thing to have a few ministers like that today.

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord.” And then he starts on, shall we say, this chain of pearls, or this golden chain, and he just brings them forward one by one. If you will, he exhibits them, he causes light to shine upon them, and then he passes on to the next, and they *are* a chain. They are all bound together. If one of these pearls in the chain were lost, the whole lot would perish, but blessed be God, not only are they beautiful and precious, but they are unchangeable. Now I do not want any vain repetition this evening, but let me just try to go through them one by one, and may the Lord use them to some of your hearts, establish you in them.

First of all, he begins with God’s eternal choice in election: “Because God hath *from the beginning* chosen you.” “From the beginning” – before there was anything else; before the world was created; before man had been created; before he had fallen. But God, seeing man’s lost, ruined, awful condition, chose sovereignly of His own will a people for His praise, not because they were any different, not because He saw any good in them, not because He knew that one day they would believe, but they were sovereignly chosen, and they were chosen unto salvation. Really the people of God, His chosen, before the world was made, before time had any being, they were as safe, eternally secure, as sure of heaven, as when they shall be landed at last. Beloved friends these are divine realities, divine certainties. Hold them fast.

“Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.” And that was in Christ, and that was through His glorious work, His bitter sufferings on the cross, His death, His glorious resurrection, His righteousness, His blood. That is where salvation is, and surely that is our great concern: Am I saved or am I lost? O that prayer to be saved! It is all of God’s grace. “God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved.)”

“Chosen ... to salvation.” And that plan of salvation could never fail. The Father, as well as choosing His people, chose His dear Son to be

their Saviour, and He gave His unworthy people into the Saviour's hand in love. O to ponder it! Knowing what it would cost Him one day, the Saviour lovingly undertook that one day He would leave heaven for earth, be born of a virgin, be born under the law to fulfil it, then to bear its curse, its penalty, to do all things, everything, that poor, guilty sinners might at last be "saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation."

"God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." But if there was a full stop there, there would be the obvious problem: yes, it is a wonderful thing to hear these truths; O but who are these chosen ones, and am I among them, and how solemn if I am not among them, and how may I know that I am among them? I think some of us go back many, many years, and how when these things came up – God's eternal election – they were times when we trembled.

"But can I bear the piercing thought:
What if my name should be left out?"

Now the Lord in love and mercy does not leave these things with no explanation or no opening. He comes right down and He tells us two things, and they are two vital things, two important things. How may we know who the Lord's chosen are, those chosen to salvation? How may you and I as unworthy sinners know that we are among them? "Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" – those two things. And they take place in every single one from first to last who were chosen from all eternity and put in the hands of Christ.

"Sanctification of the Spirit." The Lord finds His chosen ones. He finds them in their sin and in their guilt, in their unbelief, in their enmity, in their carnality, their worldliness, but He never leaves them there. There is a change. It is not just a sinner turning over a new leaf. It is the Holy Spirit's work in the heart, and that sinner, then he "leaves the hateful ways of sin, turns to the fold, and enters in." The fear of God is in his heart. The things he once despised, he now loves. The things he had no interest in, he now longs for – those blessings of salvation – and O what a sweet hope! How precious when there is a little hope that this salvation is mine! But the sinner's heart is now changed. He no longer can go on in the ways of ungodliness and sin. His desire now is to be a real follower of the Lord Jesus, to live to His honour and glory. He still feels unworthy. He feels to come so far short. He is still plagued by indwelling sin, but now he is a man

of prayer. This is the sanctifying work of the Spirit, separating him from what he once was, separating him from the world which lieth in wickedness, separating him to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is the first mark here of election: “sanctification of the Spirit.” It is the Holy Spirit’s work.

And the second thing: “Belief of the truth.” These we read of in the preceding verse, these who were damned, they were unbelievers. They “believed not the truth.” They “had pleasure in unrighteousness.” O but now that belief of the truth! What it is in simple language as it concerns you each here this evening: fleeing for refuge to the Lord Jesus. It is not believing that He was a good Man, He was the Son of God, He lived, He died, He rose again. This belief of the truth is venturing on Christ. It is coming to Him by faith. It is looking to Him. It is hanging upon Him. It is,

“Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee.”

One old minister was asked how he would define being a believer. He said this:

“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Thy kind arms I fall,
Be Thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus, and my all.”

Beloved friends, can you come in there? Can you creep in there?

“Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Well, these in this previous passage were unbelievers, and the things in the preceding verse, really one word can describe it: *perishing*. But what of the Lord’s glorious answer? What is it? “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

We had an unusual case at Bethel some years ago. An old lady came in Bethesda, determined that whatever else, she would never enter Bethel Chapel or have anything to do with Bethel Chapel. Anyway, she heard the relay at Bethesda, and one Lord’s day I preached from, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” I received a phone call from Bethesda – could I go to visit her? She said, “Could I ask you a privilege?” I said, “What’s that?” She said, “Could I be permitted to

sit down at the Lord's table at Bethel?" The love of Christ can change the hardest of hearts, and it can break down every prejudice.

"Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel." You have that precious doctrine of effectual calling. When the Lord calls a sinner savingly, it is an irresistible call. That does not mean people do not fight against it. I fought against it. I thought, "Not yet, Lord," or, "a bit more of the world." It is an irresistible call. It is that

"... period known to God
When all His sheep, redeemed by blood,
Shall leave the hateful ways of sin,
Turn to the fold, and enter in."

Called effectually. *Effectual* – it is an unusual word. It means what the Lord does, He does not just suggest it, or offer it, or propose it. It is effectual. He works and the thing is done. He says, "I will work, and who shall let it?" Who shall hinder it?

"Whereunto He called you by our gospel." Well, it is wonderful gospel we have. It is a wonderful thing to be called by the gospel, through the gospel, to the gospel.

"It speaks of pardon, full and free,
Through Christ, the Lamb once slain."

It is a gospel for unworthy sinners. Its glory is this:

"The vilest sinner out of hell,
Who lives to feel his need,
Is welcome to the Throne of Grace,
The Saviour's blood to plead."

What a blessing that word has been made to many!

"Whereunto He called you by our gospel." And what is the end of it? It began in eternity past. Now it is looking forward to eternity to come. "To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Well, what a wealth of divine truth there is here! How many precious sermons could be preached on it! Dr. Owen wrote his greatest work on it: *The Glory of Christ* – to be known eternally in heaven. Ah, but we are not to be strangers to it on earth, the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ; the glory

of His forgiveness, His great salvation; the glory of His Person; the glory of His work; the glory of His righteousness; the glory of His blood; the glory of His all-prevailing intercession. What a wonderful theme it is!

Can you remember that prayer of our Lord Jesus just before He suffered? “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory.” In measure that prayer is blessedly fulfilled whilst here on earth, whilst in this body, in the hearts and lives of all the people of God. They have a little glimpse of His glory. “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face” – the Person – “of Jesus Christ.” Surely this is one of the most sacred things a child of God can know on earth, and yet how little we really know!

But the apostle uses this striking word: *obtaining*. It is not just to go after something, to want it, to desire it. It is to take hold of it. It is to hold it fast. “The *obtaining* of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That is the end, the eternal end, of all these wonderful blessings set out in these two verses. So it looks to heaven at last, and it looks to heaven, not only as a place where there is no more sin or sorrow or suffering, but it looks to heaven as a place of glory, and the glory of heaven is in the Person of the Lord Jesus. “The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” Of course, that is that blessed truth which keeps coming through again and again in those lines based on Samuel Rutherford’s dying sayings, put into beautiful poetry by Mrs. Cousin, and ending like this:

“The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom’s face;
I will not gaze on glory
But on my King of grace.
Not on the crown He giveth,
But on His nail-pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel’s land.”

Well, what a subject! I have only touched on it, but may one or two of your hearts be touched by these glorious truths of the gospel which will stand, and which will stand for ever.

“We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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Head of the Church triumphant,
We joyfully adore Thee;
Till thou appear, Thy members here
Shall thirst for greater glory.

We lift our hearts and voices,
With blest anticipation;
And cry aloud, and give to God
The praise of our salvation.

While in affliction's furnace,
And passing through the fire,
Thy love we praise, which tries our ways,
And ever brings us higher.

We lift our hands, exulting
In Thy almighty favour;
The love divine which made us Thine
Shall keep us Thine for ever.

Thou dost conduct Thy people
Through torrents of temptation;
Nor will we fear, while Thou art near,
The fire of tribulation.

By faith we see the glory
To which Thou shalt restore us,
The world despise for that high prize
Which Thou hast set before us.

And if Thou count us worthy,
We each, as dying Stephen,
Shall see Thee stand at God's right hand,
To take us up to heaven.

C. Wesley