

# TRUE SIGNS OF OUR ELECTION OF GOD

## A SERMON

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“I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.” Isaiah 48:10

THE Lord will never savingly choose in time any but those that he has chosen in Christ before time was.

I notice, then, in the first place, *the furnace or state in which the Lord approves of his people*; for I think the word chosen here means that the Lord approves of them, and accepts them, and distinguishes them from others; so I will notice, then, *a threefold furnace into which they all more or less come, and in which the Lord approves of them*; and then *a threefold end to which they are chosen*.

First, *a threefold furnace into which they all more or less come*. The first is that of soul-trouble, *the furnace of soul-trouble*. Hence the Lord has said that “while two parts shall be cut off, and die, I will bring the third part through the fire;” that implies that they are to be brought into the fire; “and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on my name, and I will hear them; I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God.” Here, then, is the furnace of soul-trouble. And we are to test the reality of soul-trouble by two things: first, by the sinner persevering till he obtains mercy; and second, by his being brought into God’s way of salvation. It is said of Abraham that “when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces;” that is, the sacrificial pieces. And just so now, when a sinner’s earthly sun goes down, and that is the meaning of that scripture, at least, that is one part, I think, of the meaning, when it is said, “Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously that is, all the sunny prospects and anticipated pleasures of the sinner dead in sin; when conviction seizes his mind, then his earthly sun goes down, then his earthly moon is turned, as it were, into blood. There is such a change; he seems in a way he was never in before; he never felt so much concern about his soul before; and he never before saw himself such a sinner, and he never saw sin in God’s light before, and he never saw the holiness of God in its terribleness before, and he never so saw the justice of God in its inflexibility before, he never so saw the threatening’s of God before, as he sees them now. And thus he is in

trouble; and he says, My trouble, if I am left in this sin, will be an everlasting trouble; if I am left in this wrath that I have demerited, it will be everlasting trouble; and if I am left to the powers of darkness, it will be everlasting sorrow. Hence, such an one will look at the threatening's of God's word as belonging to him. Happy, thrice happy, the man that has been brought, whether gradually or instantaneously, so far into soul-trouble as to make acceptable the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence you do not read that when Moses was commanded to direct the children of Israel to take a lamb, and to do as is there, in the twelfth of Exodus, largely described, you do not find that Moses had any difficulty in getting the people to understand or to do as they were commanded. And just so it is now; when a sinner is brought into this furnace of soul-trouble, as I have said, his concern is to escape from judgment, the salvation of his soul. Now I may, before I step into the next part, just observe here that our text will apply very beautifully; "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction;" so that this very circumstance of conviction of our state, and sighing for God's mercy, this very experience stands as an evidence of our election of God. And hence it is said that his elect cry to him day and night; and here, "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." And so, I say the Israelites willingly received the paschal lamb. And so, the words come to the poor sinner, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." What does it mean? Why, it means to receive him as the spotless Lamb; it means to receive him, as we said last Sunday morning, as your sanctification; it means to receive him as the way of escape from the wrath to come; it means to receive him in the eternal perfection of his priesthood; and here you will see an end to all that you want to get rid of. Here, then, will be a crying unto the Lord; but the great test is the sincerity, that is the first thing; and then the second thing is the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ, whether we are so convinced of our state as to receive Jesus Christ in what he has really done. John the Baptist did not point out anything else as the way in which sin and the sinner could be separated; he did not point out anything else as the way in which matters could be made right with God; as the way in which we could have life, and peace, and acceptance with God; he did not point out anything else but the Lord Jesus Christ, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world." And if there be any sin which he has not taken away, then it never can be taken away, for there remains no other sacrifice for sin, there remains no more sacrifice for sin. "Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world." And the sin of the world consists of two things, namely, apostasy from God, and enmity against him. And if we have been brought into this furnace of soul-trouble, and are led to sigh unto God, then by Jesus Christ taking away sin we no more apostatize from God, we are brought into reconciliation to God, we are brought to receive Jesus Christ, never more to apostatize from God, and we are brought into the love of God by Christ Jesus, never again to hate God. Here we have found that which will serve us all the days of our life. Jesus Christ, there is in him all the grace we shall need every day we live; there is in him all we shall need when we come to die; there is in him all we shall need to perfect us at the last day; and there is in him that which shall make us happy to all eternity. Here, then, it is, in this soul-affliction, that our election of God is manifest. "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." There is, I am fully aware, a very great variety of experiences and manners of experience, by which the soul is brought to God; but all must have, let the manner of their experience be what it may, whether it be mixed with terror or not, whether it be very deep, or only gradually led along; let this be as it may, it must make way for what the Savior says when he says, "I am the way;" that is, the way to God. There is no way of being accepted of God but that way in which all sin is put away, because there cannot be harmony between God and anything where sin is; and by precious faith in Christ Jesus we stand free from sin, and his blood cleansing from all sin, we are thus brought into harmony with God. Christ is the way. "I am the way, and the truth;" that is, new-covenant truth; the word *truth* always,

when used in the gospel sense, relates to the new covenant. Christ's blood is the blood of the new covenant. So that when Christ says, "I am the truth," it does not mean law truth, it does not mean old-covenant truth, but it means that economy of truth to which he belongs. I have often said, and there will be no harm to repeat it, that Jesus Christ does not belong to the law, for he has gone to the end of that; and he does not belong to the old covenant, for he has taken that out of the way, blotted out its hand-writing, nailing it to his cross; but he belongs to the new covenant. So that when Jesus Christ says, "I am the truth," the meaning is this; the Lord swore by himself to Abraham that in blessing; he would bless him; now here stands the immutable truth of Jesus Christ as the way in which this truth stands in its certainty "In blessing, I will bless;" yes, he "has blessed, and will not reverse it." So that when Jesus Christ says he is the truth, it means new covenant truth, that to which he belongs. Thus, then, here is the furnace of affliction, soul-trouble, and apprehension of the dear Savior, as the sacrificial Lamb, taking away our sin, and as the way of access to God; and that he is the truth; "I am the way, and the truth." And I linger upon this for a moment, because it is a great privilege for the Christian to understand it. Satan is always aiming to make us mix up things and have no clear view of anything. It is a great thing to have the visual power of the mind clear, to know what definite, what particular object you have to look to; and that particular object is the Lord Jesus Christ, as the mediator of the better covenant, established upon better promises; the Lord Jesus Christ as the mediator of the new covenant, the sworn, covenant, the yea and amen covenant. Hence; the word *covenant* has a variety of meanings, and we may use the word *agreement* sometimes; where the Lord says, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them," we may, for the sake of explanation, substitute the word *agreement*, "I will make an everlasting agreement with them;" meaning, We will never fall out again. They fell out with me in the first Adam, and I with them; they fell out with me in the law, and I with them; they fell out with me in the old covenant, and I with them; there they had a quarrel with me in all these, and I had a quarrel with them; they walked contrary to me, and I walked contrary to them. But here, in this new covenant, Christ being the truth, he maintains it; here is an everlasting agreement, no disagreement can ever arise. He is thus the way of access to God. And he is the truth, that is, the truth of the new covenant, the truth of the gospel; and moreover, also, he is the life, because he swallows up death in victory. And if so, if you are brought thus far, to receive Jesus Christ after the order of this new covenant, as the way of access to God, and as the truth of that sworn covenant, and as your life, then you may expect, after you have thus been brought into all the enjoyment of these things, you may expect some wilderness discouragements. You will be brought into circumstances spiritually, for I will not here dwell upon the temporal; but you will, as to your experience, be brought into a wilderness state, and everything will seem dry, and dull, and dreary, and miserable. Hence we read of that terrible wilderness through which the Israelites went, and it proved, that wilderness work proved, too much for a great many of them, and proved that they knew not the God of Abraham, that they did not appreciate and understand the order of that covenant by which they had come out of Egypt, and therefore they went back again. But this was the case only with some. Now, if our religion be real, and the enemy come in and say, You had better give it up, you had better go back again; our answer is, Go back again? Well, but why? what for? Here is the bread of eternal life, here is Jesus Christ and he has said, "He that eats me shall live by me;" and as though that did not come low enough, he says, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness;" and he is that righteousness after which the soul is made to hunger and to thirst; even the hungry, even they are blessed. Therefore, we will not go back again; we will not give up the truth, but stand fast, let troubles be what they may. But see what a drought there is; see what dry work it is, dry preaching, and dry hearing, and dry reading, and dry prayer; it all

seems dry together, you had better give it up. Give it up? no, not while there is a living rock. There is a living rock, and that rock shall pour me out living waters, that rock shall pour me out oil; I shall yet suck honey out of the rock: I will not go back. Now then, if you can thus stand it, and endure anything and everything rather than give it up, for the Lord certainly has no pleasure in them that draw back; "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Again. Go back? what when we have a Great High Priest to plead our cause? Go back? Why, what is he a High Priest for? Why, to speak for them that cannot speak for themselves; to intercede for the dumb, to open his mouth in the cause of those that cannot open their mouths for themselves. Go back? what should we go back for? Should we go back on account of our many sins, on account of our many faults, on account of our many infirmities, should we go back on any of these grounds? What, while there is a fountain opened for just such persons? What, while there is an atonement that has perfected forever them that are thus sanctified? Go back? what, while the Lord Jesus Christ's precious blood is for the very purpose of cleansing from all sin? Give up my hope and go back? why, I could not offer a greater insult to the atonement of Christ; I could not offer a greater insult to the promises of the gospel; I could not offer a greater insult to God the Father, that has made such provision; I could not offer a greater insult to the Eternal Spirit, who has revealed such a Savior. Go back? No. And such a one when in his right mind will say, If my sins were ten million times more than they are, I would never go back; I would never despair while there is such a ransom, while there is such an atonement, while there is such a redemption, while there is such a sacrifice, while there is such a Jesus Christ as this Jesus Christ. Who is he? He is Emmanuel, God with us. "Feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood." It was this knowledge of the infinite power, and blessedness, and glory of Christ's atonement, that gave the ancients the victory. "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb." So that we will never go back while we thus have the bread of life, and the water of life, and while we have this High Priest, and this all-sufficient atonement to maintain our cause. Bless his dear and precious name! there is no reason why we should give it up. "Though he slay me," says one, "I will yet trust in him." Go back? what, while there is a mercy-seat, while there is a throne of mercy, while there is a throne of grace, and it is written on the very forefront of that throne, "Him that comes unto me I will in no way cast out?" Do not the Scriptures say, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord"? Ah, but you are such a sinner! Well, what of that? Jesus Christ came to save sinners. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord," shall have what he calls for; namely, salvation; "shall be saved." What, go back, while we have in this mercy-seat, or on this mercy-seat, the presence of the everlasting God? There our God appears and reigns in his love. Will he be disappointed? Oh no. He reigns there in his love, to have the objects of his love; will he be overcome by anything in them? He reigns there in electing grace, he reigns there in the great decree of mercy, confirmed by his dear Son; he reigns there in all the harmony of his perfections by the mediatorial achievement of the Lord Jesus Christ. So then, my hearer, if you have bodily afflictions, family afflictions, losses or crosses; if you have your rebellions, and sins, and faults, all these things are to make up that kind of furnace that will remind you that there is, after all, no real abiding-place but in Christ; that there is no continuing city but the city of God; that there is no real peace anywhere but in the things of God; God has chosen you in these afflictions, he sympathizes with you in these afflictions. See, then, here is Jesus as the bread of life; here is the mercy of God; here is the water of life; here is the High Priest pleading your cause; here is the sacrifice in all its infinite worth and preciousness; and here is the mercy-seat, and here is the presence of God. Give up? I do not wonder, for one moment, at the ancients, and comparatively moderns too, giving up their liberty, their homes, and their lives at the last, rather than give up their hope in the Lord, rather than give

up these delightful, infinitely delightful truths, by which the Lord dwells with us, and we with him. So, "I have chosen you," then, "in the furnace of affliction." If, therefore, you have been brought into soul-trouble, that is one evidence of your election of God; and if you can bear the troubles of the way without turning back, that is another evidence of your election of God. "You that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you unto this day."

I know we live in a day when there are men that pretend to preach free grace; but it is a poor, miserable free grace; and they pretend to set aside all pre-requisites and all qualifications; you have nothing to do, just as you are, but come and believe at once. And that looks very charitable; but when you do come and believe, you must then be so perfect after the flesh, so straight, and so smooth, that you must be all religion in the flesh and out of the flesh, and inside and out; and that in future your welfare lies chiefly with you, and that the more zealous and holy you are after the flesh, the more the Lord will love you and the more he will dwell with you. For they say,

"The Spirit, like some peaceful dove,  
Flies from the realms of noise and strive."

And this is the pretty ditty they tell! Therefore, with all their free grace it is nothing else but free delusion. Whereas, when the man who is taught of God comes into wilderness trials, in spite of all he can do, rebellions will rise in his heart. Very few Christians that begin and end their pilgrimage without sometimes during that pilgrimage, and some of them a many times, cursing the day in which they were born: Job did this, and Jeremiah did this; and why are those things put upon record? Not that we should aim to copy them, but to show that the people of God in all ages, when tried, would have similar feelings; and all this to make them loathe themselves in their own sight. And so far from the Spirit, like some peaceful dove, flying from the realms of noise and strife, he generally comes to me when I am in that sort of state, to see what is the matter, and put it to rights. And when the furious waves and winds were roaring, noise and storm, did the Savior get up and leave the ship, for there was such a noise and storm he could not stop there, in such an impious place? Why, the very time for him to come; he arose, and put it all to rights. Just so I find it, that so far from the Lord going, he comes to see what is the matter, and he says, What ails you? I do not know, Lord, what ails me; everything ails me; the devil, and sin, and circumstances, one thing and another. "It is better for me to die than to live," said Jonah. "I am not better than my fathers," said Elijah. Well, Elijah, here is some cake for you; and that cake will last you forty days; you will not go and tell the people it was your good temper that sustained you. And so, the Lord took care of Jonah, and so he takes care of all his children. So, my hearer, let us confess that there are many furnaces, many tribulatory scenes by the way that bring to light the many weaknesses of which we are the subjects. And the man that thus knows his own infirmities, and knows his own grief, and knows his own sore, that is the man that will cleave to the truth with all his heart, with all his mind, with all his soul, and if he had a thousand lives would lay them down rather than part with God's truth.

"The wounded soul, and not the whole,  
Becomes the true believer;  
Sinners can say, and only they,  
How precious is the Savior!"

And if you are taught of God, nothing but Christ will ever be able to make your heart really glad; if you are taught of God, nothing but these things can be a remedy for sin. No, the creature must be spoiled, must be humbled; God will stain the pride of the glory of all flesh, that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that he that glories should glory in the Lord. And such people do most heartily glory in him. Oh, how they glory in seeing the territories of hell fall; how they glory in seeing Satan fall; how they glory in seeing the perfection of Christ's priesthood; how they glory in seeing the certainty of God's truth; how they glory in the sure triumphs of omnipotent grace in our eternal salvation! The furnace of soul-trouble, to bring you to Christ; the furnace of tribulation by the way, to humble your pride, mortify you, and make you love the truth more and more.

Then, third, there is another furnace, the furnace of reproach. We live in a day of almost universal scandal among professors. There are some of the people of God are almost afraid to have a Christian companion, and very justly so too. The conversation very often degenerates into twaddle or backbiting; and away they go, and do more mischief, perhaps, in one hour than they have ever done good in all their lifetime. So that I do not think that the people of God are altogether free from blame as to the reproaches very often brought upon them. They sometimes light the fire themselves, and others will take care to bring fuel to it. "Let her be defiled," has been the language of the profane and of the professing world united; for the profane and professing world are both one in this, concerning the true Zion. "Let her be defiled;" let us give her an evil name; let us call the doctrines she holds Antinomianism; let us call the persons that follow those doctrines Antinomians; let us search out and see if we cannot by some means or another lower them in the eyes of the world, so that the world should not hear her ministers, that the world should fly from her places of worship. All this, you observe, is the device of Satan. Walk through the country, and see if you can find a place, any town or village, in all England, where the pure truth, I do not mean duty-faithism, but where vital and pure truth is preached, where there is not everything done and everything said to lower the minister, to lower the people, and to lower the place, to keep people from going there. This is the enemy's device; because he well knows that if sinners get under such a gospel as that, he is in danger of losing them. Satan well knows, Now if that sinner, or that Pharisee, if he happens to go and hear that man, why, that man in his testimony will cut up all the Pharisaism of the man, will lay open his real condition, and instrumentally make him cry for mercy, and lead him, says Satan, unto that new covenant, unto that rock which is higher than I want him to go. And therefore, Satan does all he can to lower the people of God; and we are not ignorant of his devices. "Let her be defiled." Were it not for the love I have to the truth, to the God I serve, and to the people of God as people of God, I should have left my post years ago; and even now, blest as I have been, blest as I am, if I were to confer with flesh and blood I should not preach another sermon after today. But then, what would that show? It would show that I was governed by flesh and blood; it would show that I was governed by human considerations; it would show that I want the hardiness of a good soldier; it would show that I want the faithfulness of a good steward. But the comfort of all the people of God under these circumstances, when so tried, must be that given in the word of God. You never find the people complaining of Jesus Christ being too holy; they took good care they would not attribute anything good to him if they could help it. Just so now. Any good about that high doctrine man? Impossible. Any good about those high doctrine people? Impossible. Let them be defiled. "Let our eye look upon Zion," after we have defiled her through the name we have given. Well, then, are we to be moved by that? No, no. "But they know not the thoughts of the Lord;" we do, that they are thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give us an expected end; "they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel; for he

shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor;” while these enemies, like the chaff, shall be burned up with unquenchable fire. So, then, your name may be universally bad before men, through the reproaches and scandals that Satan’s agents may cast upon you; but your name stands good before God. He knows the reality of your religion, he knows your sincerity, he knows your decision and honesty; and so, “I have chosen you.” Ah, then, “You shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake; but he that shall,” without compromising, “endure” this hatred “unto the end, the same shall be saved.” Marvel not, therefore, brethren, if you find yourselves belonging to that sect which is everywhere spoken against. Marvel not if you find a few scandalizing hypocrites among yourselves; marvel not at this, but look at it as being a few tares among the wheat that Satan sows; for “I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.” Oh, how many things there are to make the people of God cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, and put their trust in the Lord, and in the Lord alone. If these remarks be any reproof to any of you, I shall be thankful that you feel the reproof, though sorry that there should be any present to need such a reproof.

Now then, these are the three furnaces; first, soul-trouble, that makes way for the coming in of Jesus Christ; second, tribulation by the way, that endears the truth; third, the reproaches and scandalizing of men, to show the enmity of the world against the truth, and to show us our need of the Lord to interpose for us, and to take care of us, and to be with us; and also it will make us the more willing to leave this den of a world; it will make us the more willing to leave this waste howling wilderness; it will make us the more willing to leave this world, where we have so many generations of vipers and pyramids of serpents; make us the more glad to go into those peaceful regions where the wicked shall cease from troubling, and the weary be at eternal rest.

Now I had intended, though I have occupied all your time pretty nearly, to show *the threefold end* to which the people brought into this soul-trouble, led to receive Christ, suffer trouble by the way, and are cast but by the world, *the threefold end to which they are chosen*. First, they are chosen to the service of God; they are to serve him. Their eye is not to be evil because he is good; and like the penny-a-day laborers, when the master said, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?” You will never make a good servant of God unless you allow the Master to be the master and do as he pleases. “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is your eye evil because I am good?” And so you will see the rightfulness of his sovereignty in choosing whom he will, in having mercy upon whom he will; and your eye will not be evil because he is good, but your eye will be good because he is good; and you will look upon election blessedness as constituting the very essence of the gospel, as one prayed that he might see the good of God’s chosen. And then they are chosen not only to serve God, but also chosen to the marriage supper of the Lamb; chosen to be brought into the truth of indissoluble union between Christ and the church; chosen to live to eternity in all the blessedness of that provision connected therewith. But you read of some that made light of it, and others that hated it, and you read of one being there without a wedding garment. So that those who are thus taught, they will not appear without the wedding garment. And remember, the wedding garment always means two things; at least, two things are fairly implied by it; the one is the work of the Holy Spirit, adorning the soul with his graces. Hence you read, “Their covering is not the covering of my Spirit.” Oh, my hearer, if my faith, and hope, and prayer, if my love and decision, be not of the Spirit of God, if it is not the work of God’s Spirit, if it be not, as it were, his needlework, for “in raiment of needlework shall she be brought unto the king,” if it be not his work, then “if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his;” he will be like the man without the wedding garment, he will be cast out; it will show his mind is not

right. And then the wedding garment means also the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. These two go together. If your soul have the covering and adornments of the Spirit of God, it is sure to lead you to receive the righteousness of God; but to receive the righteousness of God, as a mere doctrine, as a mere notion, when it has no sympathy with the soul, no communication with the affections of the heart, then I have not, in the right sense of the word, the wedding garment. But he who is taught of the Spirit, and receives this righteousness by the Spirit of God, that is the man that is welcome there. And, lastly, they are chosen to eternal glory; not only to serve God, and that is a great honor, a very great honor, and chosen to understand this eternal oneness of Christ and the church, but chosen to eternal glory. Hence says the apostle, "We are bound to give thanks unto God, that he has from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." What truth? Gospel truth, new covenant truth. Look back at this for a moment; "We are bound to give thanks unto God, that he has from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief" 2nd chapter of 2nd Thessalonians I am referring to now, "and belief of the truth." Then eternal election is a part, an essential part, of the truth, and that is to be believed by the saved soul; salvation, as the purpose of election, is another truth to be believed by the saved soul: the sanctification, not of the flesh, but of the Holy Ghost, and that is Christ; the Holy Ghost never sanctifies the soul but by Christ Jesus. Now take notice; "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." In that scripture observe, as in many other scriptures, there is election from the beginning, salvation the purpose, sanctification and belief of the truth the way; then comes in the manifestation of it, "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." These things are put together, so that, bless the Lord! there is no coming short.

Now may we be led to bless his holy name for ever bringing us into soul trouble, forever making way in our souls for the reception of Christ, forever enabling us to endure hardness as good soldiers, and never give it up, and to endure reproach; and, lastly, to serve him willingly, to approve heartily of the eternal oneness of Christ and the church, and to glory in the delightful truth that short of his glory we never can come.

May we with increased earnestness press on to glory eternal; look not behind us, nor stay in all the plain of this world, but take more and more earnest heed to things we have heard, lest at any time, or in any sense, we should let them slip; but that we live as becometh the gospel, and realize and feel more and more the force of the dear Savior's words, "You are not of the world, even as I am not of the world: I have chosen you out of the world." And so may almighty mercy conform us yet more unto that world which is yet to come.

"For Christians are priests and kings,  
All born of heavenly birth.  
Then think on nobler things,  
And grovel not on earth."