

TO THE ELECT OF GOD (IN A TIME OF TROUBLE.)

The elect of God exist, although no man can individually identify them. They are after a common family likeness, although differently situated in the present evil world. They have one faith, and one aim, and one mind, though following different occupations, and living in different parts of the earth. We greet them in the name of the Lord, wishing them and praying for them grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Beloved, ye are known of God, though you may not be discerned by men. You are scattered up and down the world, in a cloudy and dark day, undistinguishable to human eyes, from the common mass of mankind. Your divine mark or seal, wherever you are to be found, consists of the belief, obedience and love of the truth which God has caused to be set forth in the writings of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Apostles. Having this mark, you are precious in his eyes. Your faith is well-pleasing to him; your obedience, your free-will offerings, your sacrifices in his service at a time when all the world ignores him ascend before him as the odor of a sweet smell, and are acceptable to him through the High Priest of our profession. And they will be spoken of again, to your great joy, in a day when they will seem to have been all forgotten, and when they will seem too small to be mentioned in the presence of the world-stirring events that will belong to the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. I write to you concerning our common affliction – common in a large sense. I do not write to you because I know you. Some of you I doubtless know; but no man knows you as "the Lord knows them that are his." A man cannot even know himself in this sense. As our beloved brother Paul has said, "I judge not mine ownself; he that judgeth me is the Lord." We know the principles upon which men will be saved, because they have been revealed; but we are not capable of discerning infallibly where these principles have had their effectual work, though we may discern where they are set aside

and violated. I write to you as those whom the Lord loves, and who will be banded together in a joyous company when the Lord comes. I write to you as one of you, having the same experience and the same [R762 : page 3] need. The scorner may mockingly enquire what right I have to write to such. I answer, the right of brotherly love, which belongs to every man who can rise to his privileges in Christ. Brotherly love leads to brotherly concern in all things, but particularly in those that relate to our standing in God, our position in the present probation and our hope concerning the purpose of God which will surely be accomplished. Your present lot is grievous in many respects; and at times you are greatly cast down, and nigh despairing altogether of the Lord's promised kindness in Christ. I write to remind you of the cause you also have for encouragement and joy.

You feel unworthy of the great salvation to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; remember that, though, only those whom the Lord esteems worthy will enter the kingdom, yet part of that worthiness consists in the very sense of unworthiness which oppresses you. God's favor is for those only who rate themselves at God's standard; and by this standard we are, as Jacob confessed himself to be, "unworthy of the least of all the mercy and the truth" that the Lord shows to his people. For what are we at best but worms of the earth, fashioned in God's image, made of his clay, and permitted to live for a few years on the face of his glorious earth. The most righteous man can say with Job, whom the Lord approved, "Behold, I am vile...wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." If a righteous man could feel this abasement – (most reasonable abasement in mortal flesh in the presence of the divine glory) – is it a marvel that we who add error to weakness and sin to corruptibility should sometimes feel "broken in heart and contrite in spirit"? It is right: but be not destroyed by this abasement. It is pleasing to God. To such he more than once plainly declared he looks with approval.

But your sins, they distress you: it is right they should; but look again and be comforted. There is a sin not unto death. You are not

callous towards the Lord. You do not run in the way he has forbidden. You do not love the present world, and run with it in all its "ungodliness and worldly lusts – the lusts of the eye and the pride of life." You do not deny God and live in deliberate disobedience of his commandments. On the contrary, you love his name and word; you believe his testimonies and rejoice in his institutions; you love, and look, and long for the appearing of his Son whom he has promised to send; and you are striving in all the ways of life, so far as in you lies, to do his will as expressed in his commandments. But you fail often. You come short of what you would do. You frequently do things you would not do; and you are distressed on this account. It is right to be so; but do not forget the provision that has been made: Christ has taken away our sins. We are washed in his blood. He stands in the **[R762 : page 4]** Father's presence, not only as the accepted sacrifice, but as the appointed high priest for his house. He ever liveth to make intercession for us, according to the will of God. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to forgive us all our iniquity. If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sins. God forgives us for Christ's sake.

Perhaps you are oppressed with a sense of the unsuitability of such persons as you, being promoted to honor and power in the kingdom of God. Remember it is God's deliberate plan to make choice of such. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called,...but God hath chosen the weak things of this world." Jesus spoke of this, and said: "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." He even gave thanks to the Father for proceeding on this plan. There is a reason in it all. The kingdom is to be established for God's honor, not man's; for the Spirit's objects and not those of flesh. Hence, it is a necessity that men be provided for its administration who are not proud and lifted up in their eyes, but who are lowly and who know and reverence God so deeply as to find pleasure in his exaltation. The blessing of man will come out of it all, but glory to God first. If God made choice of the aristocracy, his purpose, ("I will be exalted among the heathen") would not be accomplished. They are full of themselves.

He chooses men who are empty of themselves that they may be full of God. Poor men, in the day of evil, are the kind of material out of which he can provide the earthen vessels in which his eternal treasure can be deposited, "that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of man."

But you say: "Such poor weak people as we, are not fit to be kings and priests." True, not as you are now. It is not as you are now that you will be elevated to that position. You will be changed from the mortal to the immortal, and this change will fit you in every way for what you will have to do. It will give you strength and grace and capacity and gladness of heart. You will be able to carry yourselves as kings, and to sustain yourselves without fatigue, and to bring the wisdom of Solomon to bear in the judgment of all matters you may have in charge. Qualification of this sort is all in God, who will liberally crown his children with the highest gifts in the day of their exaltation. The one thing needful is a humble, loving, obedient heart and pliant will, which can only be developed and put to the proof by the exercise of faith in a day like this; and the operation can only be successfully performed, in most cases, in circumstances of poverty and self-denial. Consequently your lowly position and inefficient state, instead of being a cause of dubitation, should help your confidence, as furnishing in your case, the likely elements of suitability for the glory to be revealed.

But in another way, you may feel the cloud return. The time is long, and human nature is weak, and power fails, and you feel yourselves walking towards the darkness which bounds the horizon of all natural life; yea, the darkness will oftentimes steal into your inmost soul, and fill you with an indescribable horror, as you survey the vastness of the universe, in which God is apparently silent, and the almost infinite mass of abortive life that appears upon the earth from generation to generation. Be comforted concerning this, also: this darkness is inseparable from God's plan. Nay more: it is essential to it. Human life on the earth can no more reach the glory to be revealed without this experience, than the fruits of the field can appear without

ploughing and harrowing. It is part of the plan. God's wisdom is in it, and his love, for God is love. We shall see it. Meanwhile we must exercise faith, without which he cannot be pleased. Faith working by love can see a little even now – by starlight, as it were. The darkness is prolonged for the world as a whole; but it is short for any generation. It has been on the earth for ages, but no generation lasts for ages. We knew nothing of it last century; our turn had not come. Our turn has now come: it depresses, but it will soon be over, and when over, the next thing in our experience (apparently the immediate next) if actually delayed however long, is the eternal sunshine of the Father's manifested presence, power and glory. We shall find then what has been done for us by present exposure in the darkness and coldness of earth's winter. It is the Father's appointment for us meanwhile. What can we say but "Thy will be done?" He doth not willingly afflict. Not only so, but he ministers to our need while we pass through the darkness. None of the elect of God is left alone. God is with him to guide and strengthen in many invisible ways. God cares for him: pities him; chastens him; upholds and prepares him for the inheritance that is in store for all the sons of light: an inheritance in which they will commune with unspeakable joy, after the prolonged and bitter fight of faith victoriously waged in their several evil days. But remember the end. Remember the joyful muster of the Lord's elect.

This touches another sorrow you have. In your several spheres of probation, you are yearning for what you never realise. You hunger and thirst for the prevalence of a noble enlightenment among men. You love God yourselves with all your heart and souls. You long to see others rejoice in him and exalt him in a sincere and intelligent way. You have a compassionate regard for the condition of mankind, and desire, with even a tearful earnestness, to see them in a blessed condition. You sigh and faint for the delights of sanctified and intellectual friendship in which the hearts of companions should open with a noble warmth to the great and noble topics that the universe presents to the mind, instead of gravitating heavily to the petty accidents of animal life. Ah, and you are afflicted with your own

incapacities that blur the sight and enfeeble the hands, and drag you into abysses of gloom as dark and dreadful as Jonah's habitation in the storm-tost sea. – Now, there is comfort concerning all this. It is somewhat negative in its form; but, then, it is true, and true comfort wears well, whereas false comfort fails you in the long run. The comfort is that these things are unattainable in the present condition of human life upon earth, but they are attainable and will be realized in their very perfection in the kingdom of God. The recognition of this is a help. We reconcile ourselves hopefully to our lot, enduring the hardness of the desert by knowing that it is a desert, and in the confident anticipation of the land of promise at the end of the journey. One comfort more. It is not displeasing to the Father that we thus hunger and thirst to the point even of misery, after righteousness. On the contrary, Jesus said, "Blessed are ye that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for ye shall be filled."

Finally, you are troubled and distressed by dissensions in the household of faith. Many of you have been plunged into deep grief, even unto many tears. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial." It is nothing new. It is the modern form of a very ancient and **[R763 : page 4]** frequent experience, resulting from the fermentation of diverse elements brought together by the knowledge of the truth. We must trust to God's wisdom in permitting of the admixture of these elements. He has done so from the beginning. Do not be too much distressed by it. The results that come of it do not alter things; they only prove, and try, and manifest things. The word of the Lord standeth sure amid all the chafes, and changes, and corruptions of men. The Lord Jesus, from the serene exaltation of the heavens, has for centuries beheld the confusions, and commotions, and wars that have wrought havoc among men in his absence. He has beheld them without surprise. He foresaw them and foretold them. He said there would be strife and division; that iniquity would abound; that the love of many would wax cold; that the trial would be too severe for some, but he that should endure to the end would be saved. Can we imagine that such things are permitted without a purpose? The apostolic age was rife with

them; is it a marvel if we have our share? There is but one answer on the part of enlightened reason, and that answer will help us to stand in the midst of the evil and to hold fast unmoved the hope of the gospel, looking to Christ, who lives, distrusting ourselves, who die. Our life is fleeting away; the battle will soon be over. Be strong and of good comfort. Stand fast; quit you like men. Keep close to the word in daily reading, and the peace of God will rule your hearts and minds and preserve you amid all chafes and tumults, unto his glorious kingdom, which will heal all sores, and chase all darkness for ever away.

Your fellow-sufferer, fellow-soldier, fellow-pilgrim and fellow-suppliant of the mercy of God unto eternal life.

– ***Robert Roberts.***

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