

WHAT SHALL WE SAY TO THESE THINGS?

"What, then, shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." – Rom. 8:31,28.

The early churches, whether composed of Jews or Gentiles, although they had accepted of Christ and had become his disciples, were still largely influenced by their former Jewish ideas and prejudices. The Jews, particularly, were slow to believe that now they merely stood on a common level with their Gentile brethren, having no pre-eminence whatever over the Gentiles; their only special favor, and a great one, though they failed to realize it as such, being in the fact that the gospel of the new dispensation was offered to them first. On the other hand, the Gentile converts, long accustomed to regard the Jews as the chosen people of God, were still disposed to grant them supremacy, and to be influenced by their prejudices. And until these prejudices were overcome, growth in grace, in the knowledge of the truth, and in the full assurance of faith, was greatly hindered. In order to fully appreciate the generous scope and breadth of the divine plan, the contracted views they had gained from God's dealings with Israel as a typical people must be dropped.

It was with this thought in mind, and that he might assist the Jews to a humble recognition of their position, as well as to encourage and strengthen the Gentile believers, that Paul wrote his remarkable letter to the church (the company of believers) at Rome, as well as various portions of his other epistles to other congregations. The Jews were all strong believers in election. They knew and gloried in the fact that God had chosen them for his people, and made promises with reference to them to their father Abraham, long before they were born, and that while he paid no attention to other nations, he gave to them

continual evidences of his favor and care. He superintended their affairs as a nation, gave them his law, appointed their judges, overcame their enemies, chastised them for their sins, and comforted and blessed them when they turned from their sins back to righteousness; and finally he sent his Son to them to be their Prophet, Priest and King. Thus God was a father to them, and owned them as his children, while for the time he seemed to ignore all other nations. And his promise was, that through them, in due time, the other nations should be blessed.

But this favor of God to Israel did not have the effect of bringing them to loving, filial obedience and a hearty co-operation in God's plan, with a humble and grateful recognition of their constant dependence upon him. On the contrary, they were "a stiff-necked, rebellious house," puffed up with pride, as though they were worthy, and almost continually required the rod of correction. They were proud, and boastful of being the children of Abraham, concerning whom God had made so many wonderful promises; and though unworthy of any of God's favors, they were disposed to claim his favor on the ground of worthiness – as if they had merited it by keeping his law.

They thought they were "*the elect*" to whom pertained the adoption, and all the promises, and all the glory. And truly, they were the elect, and heirs of the promise to Abraham, in the only sense in which either they or Abraham could understand it; but there was a grander significance to that promise, intended for the spiritual seed of Abraham, which was entirely concealed until the dawning of the Gospel age, when it was brought to light and made manifest through the apostles – to the Jews first, and afterward to the Gentiles.

Paul's letter to the Romans was part of his effort to free both Jews and Gentiles from the former yoke of Judaism, and to lead them to implicit confidence in Christ as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, whether Jew or Gentile, as well as to give

them a clear appreciation of the *chief* favor of God *now* offered, and the conditions on which it might be obtained.

Even among those Jews who had believed on Christ, there was still the disposition to put upon Gentile believers the yoke of Judaism, and to trust at least measurably in the Law for the favors now [R1140 : page 7] promised only through faith in Christ. Their experience for nearly two thousand years past should have proved to them, beyond a doubt, their inability to keep the law and thereby merit God's favor; and had they not been so stiff-necked and proud, they would have been glad to realize their release from the condemnation of the Law, and to accept of God's favor in Christ on precisely the same terms offered to the Gentiles – the only terms on which they could receive it.

Paul's argument in this letter to the Romans is not to prove or disprove the doctrine of election: that doctrine was already accepted. But his effort was to prove from the Scriptures, that although God had elected or chosen them as a people in the past, that was no proof that they would always be the people of his special favor. They were not in their pride and hardness of heart to console themselves with the thought that they had Abraham for their father; "for I say unto you," said John the immerser, "that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (Matt. 3:9.) God never meant to make such as they were at heart the heirs of his choicest favors. Israelites as a nation had proved their unworthiness, and had thereby forfeited the chief place of favor with God; for the promise that they should be the *chief* favorites was conditional – "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." – Exod. 19:5,6.

The chief favor had been blindly forfeited by Israel as a nation, though it was still within the reach of any individuals of that nation who might yet comply with the conditions and become joint-heirs of

this chief favor, together with their Gentile brethren. Paul declared (Rom. 9:1-5) that he had great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart, because Israelites, his brethren according to the flesh, were so foolish and blind as not to perceive the great favor offered to them, and to them *first*, as another and their last mark of special favor.

Then he adds (verse 6) that their failure as a nation to obtain the chief favor implied in the Abrahamic promise does not make the promise of God a failure. The fact that God could not own and use them, as a nation, to accomplish his work of the future, to bless all the families of the earth, would not thwart God's plan. On the contrary, Paul shows (verse 8) that the two sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, illustrated the fact that the *natural* seed of Abraham (Israel according to the flesh) would not inherit the chief blessings: for Ishmael was born in the ordinary course of nature, but Isaac, who typified the true heirs, was not so born, but on the contrary came by the exercise of divine power – not of the will of the flesh, but of God, for Sarah was not only barren but aged. (Heb. 11:11,12; John 1:13.) The Apostle's argument is, that this fact of passing by of the first-born and natural offspring, in the type, and the giving of the blessing to one not naturally born, to one subsequently born by divine interposition and in fulfilment of the original promise, showed that the natural or fleshly descendants of Abraham would not obtain the great, promised favor, but that *another seed*, a spiritual seed, would be developed, begotten of God by the word of truth, which would inherit all the privileges and honors contained in those promises.

This fact, that the *natural* heirs would be set aside as unworthy, and a later-born be granted the more honorable place, was illustrated also in the two children of Isaac – Esau being passed by and Jacob being accepted as the heir of the Abrahamic promises.

The rejection of Ishmael and Esau was not an injustice; it in no sense or degree related to their future, everlasting welfare. God had a great blessing to bestow, and Ishmael and Esau were made types of,

to illustrate the unworthiness of fleshly Israel to inherit this great blessing, while Isaac and Jacob were made types of, to illustrate the selection of Christ and the Gospel Church to be God's instrumentalities for blessing all the world, in due time. The rejection of Ishmael and Esau, and natural Israel whom they typified, leaves them under *no disadvantage*, but on the common general footing with all men and all nations, aside from the "*heirs* of the kingdom." In fact, they have an advantage over others by reason of the closeness of their natural relationship to the "*heirs*;" and they will be among the first to be blessed, when the true seed is completed and given the power to bless and restore the world.

The promise made to Abraham will have its fulfilment, not only in this higher sense to the children of God – Christ Jesus and the church, typified by Isaac and Rebecca who became his joint-heir, – but also to Abraham personally and those of his natural seed who have come, or shall come, into harmony with the divine plan; for there will be two phases of the Kingdom of God which is to bless all nations, an earthly and a heavenly phase. (See, MILLENNIAL DAWN, Vol. I., chapter xiv.) Thus the promise made to Abraham will "be sure to all his seed; not to that only which is of the Law [the natural seed], but to *that also* which is of the faith of Abraham, who [as a figure or type of God] is the father of us all...*like unto Him* whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and declareth those things which be not, as though they were." (Rom. 4:16,17.) And this intention on God's part to recognize more than Israel in the covenant blessing is shown also in the declaration to Abraham, – "I have constituted thee a father for *many* nations." This proves, conclusively, that God had in mind, originally, the selection of the promised *seed of blessing*, of which Christ is Head and Lord, as well as Redeemer. [R1141 : page 7] – Gal. 3:16,29.

In the clearer light of the then dawning dispensation, Paul showed that Israel had nothing whereof to glory over Gentile believers in Christ; that though they had been the called and favored

people of God from the very beginning of their history, their continuance in that favor beyond the limit of their special dispensation was contingent upon their worthiness – in other words, upon their meekness and faith in the Messiah, and in the advanced truths of the new dispensation, then being declared by his faithful apostles.

Israel as a nation had already forfeited its privileges as God's favorites, but to individuals of that nation who were in the right condition of heart, this highest favor was first offered, yet on precisely the same terms that it was shortly after offered to the Gentiles: "For" he adds (chap. 10:12), "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." The class which God had fore-ordained should receive this chief favor was to be composed of those who should be "conformed to the image of his Son." (Rom. 8:29.) They must all have his likeness, be meek and lowly in heart, desiring only to know and to do the will of God at any cost or any sacrifice of their own will. This class God fore-knew or fore-ordained to receive "the fatness of the Abrahamic promise;" and to all of this class, whether found among Jews or Gentiles, the promise is *sure*. They shall be joint-heirs with his Son in the glory of his kingdom, and among them all distinctions of Jew and Gentile are obliterated; for unto this honor these were fore-ordained before the foundation of the world. These are the antitypical seed of Abraham, the children of God, "the elect according to the fore-knowledge of God," not as individuals but as a class, to whom belong the promises of eternal glory.

Then, dear reader, if you are of this class thus conformed to the image of God's dear Son, if like him your will and effort is simply to know and do the will of God, if you are meek and lowly of heart, ready to receive instruction and profit by it at any cost, then take courage: you may thus be sure that you are one of those called to be of this elect class, and that you have accepted the call and are accepted in God's plan as a probationary member of the class fore-ordained to

receive this divine honor of the kingdom. But if you have not this image of Christ, do not deceive yourself, you are not of the elect class; for "if any man hath not the spirit [this mind or likeness] of Christ, he is none of his." – Rom. 8:9.

Oh! says some timid one, but I am so unworthy, it surely is not for me; I am conscious every moment of my imperfection and short comings.

That may be very true, yet if you have the likeness above referred to, the prize is open to you. God knows your weaknesses and shortcomings; he knew it before he called you; he knew you could not keep his law perfectly, though you would greatly desire and try to do so; and so before he called you he made abundant provision for your justification. You were justified freely from all things by the death of Christ, your Redeemer. (Rom. 3:24.) "Whom God called, them he also justified." Not one was ever "called," *i.e.*, invited to run for this kingdom prize, who was not first justified; and moreover, all "whom he justified, them he also honored" [*doxazo*, honored; "glorified" is a poor translation] *with a "call."* (Rom. 8:30.) Therefore, every called one is justified, and every justified one is honored with a call. It is for this purpose – that they might be eligible to the high calling – that *any* are justified (reckoned righteous through the imputed righteousness of Christ) in this age. And no one is thus justified by God through Christ, who has not repented of sin, believed on Christ as his Redeemer, and who does not humbly desire and endeavor to do the will of God.

And if those thus justified and called heed the call and comply with its conditions – presenting themselves living sacrifices to God, with the same meek, obedient and teachable spirit, resolutely endeavoring to fulfil those conditions – they are sure of the great reward, the grandest favor in the gift of God, even though to other eyes than God's they may seem very unworthy, because of unavoidable weaknesses and imperfections of the flesh.

What a full provision is this for us: that, though you be Jew or Gentile, bond or free, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, weak or strong, the promise, the very fatness of the Abrahamic promise, is for you, if you are Christ's, and being conformed to his image. Make your calling and election sure by continuing to conform to his image, faithfully, unto death.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." We are not promised the luxuries of this life – ease, comfort, health, friends, etc., etc. On the contrary, we are fore-warned to expect the very opposite – enemies, persecutions, and the loss of all things, though we are promised that these ills of the present time, patiently and faithfully borne for the truth's sake, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and that all of them shall work together for our good.

What then shall we say to these things? If God, with all his power, and wisdom, and love, be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Could he manifest his love in any stronger way than that? Could he show us by any stronger evidence, how freely he will give us all the glorious things which his exceeding great and precious promises lead us to hope for? If we would yet more fully assure our faith, let us remember our dear Lord's words – "Fear not, little flock, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;" "for the Father himself loveth you." – Luke 12:32; John 16:27.

Well may we then ask, If God be for us, who can be against us? Puny indeed is the arm of flesh that is raised against the saints in defiance of the Almighty. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God himself that justifieth. The supreme Judge of the supreme court has acquitted, once forever, all that are *in* Christ.

Who is he that condemneth? Surely not our Lord Jesus, for he also commended his love toward us in freely giving his life for our redemption. Yea, more, he is even now at the right hand of God, making intercession for us, – not in the sense of pleading with the Father to do for us what he already planned and arranged to do, but his very presence at the right hand of power is the constant and availing plea for our salvation, proof that God's law was satisfied, that the claims of justice, which were against us, are fully met and forever canceled. Who, then, is he that condemneth, and seeketh to convince us that we are still condemned, that we are not justified freely from all things by the precious blood of Christ? It is the adversary! Beware of his deceptions, whether from within or without, or whether saint or sinner be his mouth-piece.

If such be the love of Christ, who shall separate us from his love? You may have no charms in the eyes of the world; you may be old, deformed, awkward, crippled, blind, deaf, unlearned, illiterate, sick, despised, ridiculed, hated, friendless, poor, and persecuted; but no matter, these things cannot separate us from the love of Christ, or from the love of our Father, if we have the image of his Son. "Hearken, O daughter," says the Psalmist (45:10,11), "consider and incline thine ear, forget also thine own people and thy father's house" – forget the world in the sense of any cravings or desires for its approval or favors, and let your interests and affections be bound up with Christ's, and let your rejoicing be in the fact that you are called to be his bride. "So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty." Thou art beautiful already in his eyes; for he looks upon the heart and reads its loyalty to him.

Yes, says the Apostle, and "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." – Rom. 8:39.

When you have bitter persecution and affliction, and worldly professors of Christianity look on and say, He is an evildoer and therefore the Lord will not permit him to prosper, heed it not, but keep on your way rejoicing in the Lord and in the privilege of bearing some of the reproaches that were heaped upon him, and let his word comfort you: "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace." Then forget the world and its opinions, that you may the more fully enjoy the peace of God which passeth the understanding of all others than this elect class.

Call to mind also, for your comfort, how God's elect ones, to whatever position he had called them, were always thus tried. Paul in Rom. 9 cites the cases of Jacob and Esau. Jacob was the chosen, the beloved one, and Esau was loved less and not chosen; yet it was Jacob that suffered tribulation, while Esau flourished and increased in goods. So also the chosen nation of Israel was disciplined under suffering, while other nations took their own course and received no discipline. The present is the time of discipline to the chosen ones. What son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? If we receive no chastisement, then we may be sure we are not sons.

Then what shall we say to these things? Is there any space left for doubts and fears? May we not have the full assurance of faith, in proportion as we are faithfully conformed to the image of God's dear Son, in meekness and entire consecration to the will of God? The promise of God is not to the fearful and unbelieving, but to those who like Joshua and Caleb say, Since God has called us, we be fully able to go up and possess the land of promise. **[R1142 : page 7]** What God has promised, he is able also to perform: "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." (1 Thes. 5:24.) The promise is to the called and chosen [accepted] and faithful. Let us prove faithful! – Rev. 17:14.

"What more can he say
Than to you he hath said:

You who unto Jesus
For refuge have fled?"
