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"IF GOD BE FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?"

– ROMANS 8:31. –

WHAT wonderful thoughts these words arouse! God for us! God on our side! It means almighty wisdom enlisted in our interest, almighty power to be exerted on our behalf, almighty love and infinite goodness watching over us and caring for and helping us. What immeasurable lengths and breadths, heights and depths of infinite grace are here so forcibly and so concisely set before the mind!

But, we notice a limitation: The Apostle's suggestion is not that God is for every one, but for "*us*." To whom does he refer by this word "us?" Is it possible that divine love and energy, wisdom and power are not being exerted on behalf of the world, but only on behalf of the Church in this present time?

Christian people are divided in their opinion respecting this matter. Our Methodist friends and generally Universalists and Unitarians hold that God is [R2376 : page 315] not for *us*, the Church, specially; but that he is for everybody, everywhere. They hold that he is today trying to save everybody, and that he has been so trying for the past six thousand years. They must of course admit, when making such a claim, that thus far the divine plan has failed of success for six thousand years; because, men are not saved, and only a small proportion have yet had the necessary opportunity for salvation; namely, a knowledge of the only "name given under heaven or amongst men whereby we must be saved." They must realize that the logic of facts is against their contention, and against all hope that by present methods and arrangements the world would ever be converted; for, they are aware that while it is claimed in a general way that nearly a million heathen have been converted during the last century (and it is safe to say that a very large proportion of these are not as thoroughly converted as might be desired – that comparatively few of them could

be termed "saints"), yet, during the same time it is estimated that the numbers of the heathen have increased, in a natural way, to the enormous sum of two hundred millions. How long would it require at this rate, at this ratio of conversion, one million converts to two hundred million births, to convert the world? All can see that such hopes are quite illogical. Nevertheless, we can sympathize with and greatly appreciate the warmth of heart on the part of many of these whose theology we now criticise. Many of them – at least the founders of the systems – were forced to such conclusions (namely, that God is doing the best he can do for the world), in opposition to the doctrine of election and foreordination, as it has heretofore been misunderstood.

On the other hand, the great majority of Christian people, namely, the various branches of the Presbyterian, the Episcopal, the Lutheran, the Baptist and the Congregationalist churches *deny the theory* that God has been trying to save the world for the past six thousand years and has failed of his purpose. They hold, to the contrary, that his purpose has been to select or elect out of the world a Church and that this work of election has been progressing and will finally be consummated; and that thus God's Word through the prophets shall be fulfilled, "My Word that goeth forth out of my mouth shall not return unto me void; but it shall *accomplish that which I please*, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isa. 55:11.) They hold that, since all of God's purposes shall be accomplished, it can not have been his purpose either to have converted the world, or to have brought every creature to a knowledge of Christ during the past six thousand years; because neither thing has been accomplished, therefore neither thing could have been purposed.

We were about to say that we agree with the last [R2376 : page 316] mentioned numerous families of Christians in reference to the doctrine of election; but we cannot make so broad a statement. While we find in the Scriptures the declaration that an election is in progress during this age especially, and to some extent during all the past, yet

it is not the *kind of election* to which such large numbers of our Christian friends hold. Their view of divine foreordination implies not only the election of a Church, but the damnation of all who are not elected; and here we must differ; for we find nothing of this kind in the Word of the Lord. We find nothing in it to imply that all the non-elect are hopelessly lost; but, on the contrary, the teaching that the election of the Church (Christ the head, the Church his body), during this Gospel age, is for the very purpose that they as the "seed of Abraham" may fulfil the divine plan as expressed in God's promise to Abraham, namely, that in this seed (Christ and the Church – Gal. 3:16,29), as the heirs of the divine promise and benevolent intention, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Not only is the *character* of the Scriptural election a very different one from that which has generally been held by Calvinism, but the *object* of the election is as widely as possible different from their conception. We would use the same language as our Calvinistic friends in speaking of the "*us*" of our text, in that we would say that it refers to the elect Church, but we deny that the damnation of all others is either stated or implied.

In the preceding verses (29,30) the Apostle explains the character and methods of the divine selection of the elect Church: and we cannot do better than notice its details, because so much depends upon this point. If we can find in the Apostle's description good and sufficient evidence to assure us that we are of this elect Church, then we shall have great cause for thankfulness, confidence and joy, in realizing that God with all his almighty power, and wisdom and love is enlisted on our behalf. A great difficulty with many seems to be, not that they doubt that there is such an election in progress, nor that they doubt that God is *for* some, but that they doubt that they belong to that elect class – doubt, therefore, that they are of the "*us*," and that God is for them; and that he is causing all things to work together for good to them.

By reason of their natural constitution, some of the humble-minded of the Lord's people lack the confidence which they should

have, while in some instances others who have such confidence, have no real basis for it. Knowledge, therefore, clear knowledge of the Apostle's argument, is essential to proper faith respecting this subject, and proper confidence in God's care over those who have been adopted into his family and are seeking to make their calling and election sure. Our faith is made necessarily dependent to a large extent upon our understanding of the divine revelation on these subjects. Let us therefore critically examine the Apostle's statement with reference to the various steps in this election, and note our own connection with the same, step by step, that we may know to a certainty whether or not we are of the "*us*" class which he mentions, on behalf of whom the Lord's power and wisdom are and will be exerted.

The Apostle begins by asserting divine foreknowledge; a divine attribute which will not be questioned by any Christian. God not only foreknew the sin that would enter into the world through the liberty given to father Adam and mother Eve, but he also foresaw the fall that would take place as the result of his own sentence, and the mental, moral and physical degradation which have resulted. Moreover, he foreknew that in due time he would send his "Only Begotten Son," our Lord, to ransom all from sin and its penalty, so that ultimately he might be the Deliverer of all who desire to return to harmony with their Creator. He not only foreknew the humiliation of our Lord, his First-begotten Son, from his condition of glory and spiritual nature to the lower conditions of human nature, but he foreknew his trials, and his faithfulness through them, even unto death, even the death of the cross. In all this he foresaw our redemption sacrifice. He foresaw also the glory which he designed to bestow upon our Lord Jesus following his obedience, as expressed by the Apostle Paul, saying, "Him hath God highly exalted, and given him a name [title, honor, etc.] above every name."

But our Heavenly Father foreknew and foreordained still more than all this, – the selection of the Church to be the "body" of Christ, the "bride" of Christ, his associate, not only in the sufferings and trials

of the present life, but also in the subsequent glory, and great work of "blessing all the families of the earth." This is distinctly stated by the same Apostle in his letter to the Ephesians (1:4), where he declares that "God hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world." The same foreordination is distinctly stated by the Apostle Peter, who writes to consecrated believers, addressing them, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father, through sanctification of the spirit," etc. – 1 Pet. 1:2.

But the *predestination* of this verse (Rom. 8:29) is not at all what has generally been understood: it is not said that God predestinates that some should go to heaven and others to eternal torment. That is where false human reasoning has corrupted the testimony of God's Word and made it of none effect, or worse – of bad effect. The Apostle's statement is very clear, that God predestinated that all who shall be of this elect, **[R2376 : page 317]** foreknown and foreordained Church in glory must first be "*conformed to the image of his Son*" – or, as the literal reading would give it, "copies of his Son." How reasonable this predestination, how unreasonable the false view! God is calling a number of sons to "glory, honor and immortality," and has made Christ Jesus the Only Begotten, faithful in every trial, the Head or Captain of this foreordained company, whom he has since been calling, testing and preparing for the foreordained glory. And as it was but a reasonable thing that God should determine that if our Lord Jesus would be faithful he should receive the highest exaltation, so it was equally right and proper that the divine will should be forcibly asserted and that he should *predestinate* that none could be of that glorified "body of Christ," except as they would become imitators of Jesus, who is the firstborn among these his "brethren."

Having thus stated the matter concisely, the Apostle proceeds to apply it to the Church individually, and to show the steps which God is taking during this Gospel age for the purpose of finding amongst men this class which he has foreordained shall be found. The Apostle gives the particulars in the following verse (30); and altho it is simply

stated, it has very generally been stumbled over, not only by believers in general, but also by theologians, because of two things. [R2377 : page 317] (1) The last word of this verse translated "glorified" should be translated "honored;" and should be understood to refer to the honor conferred upon all who, during this age, are brought to any knowledge of Christ – the true light. This *honor* went first to the Jews, and selected a "remnant;" but when that nation proved unworthy of this "*honor*" it was turned to the Gentiles, to gather out of them a peculiar people, a holy nation, to bear the name of Christ. (Acts 15:14.) (2) The reader naturally expects the Apostle to begin with present conditions and trace them up to the grand result – the glorified Church, – while on the contrary the Apostle very properly begins at the other end, and traces the results downward. He does not begin, as is generally supposed, by saying, God honored you with the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ, and when you believed he justified you, and after you were justified he called you, and if you are faithful to your calling he will by and by exalt you to the condition which he foreknew. Indeed, it would not be possible to state the matter truthfully from that side; because, many are honored with a knowledge of the Gospel of Christ who are never justified (because they do not accept the knowledge – do not accept Christ), and of those who do accept Christ and who are thus justified, it would not be true to say that they will all be sanctified; nor would it be correct to say that all who once are sanctified will reach the condition of glory; for "many are called but few chosen:" few "make their calling and election sure."

But the Apostle argues the matter from the only proper and logical standpoint: having stated that God has foreknown or fore-intended the election of the Church, he steps forward to the time when God's purpose and intention will have been completed, accomplished – the time when the election will be finished and the Church accepted to glory. From that future standpoint he indicates the various steps *which led up to it*, saying, – All those of the foreknown ones, glorified, will previously have been called; because it is a matter of grace, and no man taketh this honor unto himself, but "he that is called

of God;" – as the "Head of the body," so each member of the body. And, says the Apostle, every one thus "called" will previously have been "justified;" because God calls no enemies, no unreconciled sinners, to this high position. It was for this reason that Christ died, that through faith in his blood repentant believers might be "*justified*" and might be thus *prepared* to be "called." It is thus evident that the high calling to this glorious position of joint-heirship with Christ is a very different thing, indeed, from the calling of sinners to repentance. Sinners are called to repentance anywhere and everywhere and at any time. And when they repent, the Lord engages that in due time he will point them to

"The fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
Where sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains."

When they have lost their guilty stains, through repentance and faith in the Redeemer, they have reached the condition of *justification*, and are ready to be "called" to sonship and joint-heirship. But the Apostle is still going backward in the argument and, having told that the foreordained class would all be "called," and that they would all previously have been "justified," he declares that the justified ones would all previously have been favored or "honored" (not glorified): honored or favored with a *knowledge of the truth*, a knowledge of the gospel.

Perhaps only a comparatively small number of Christians have realized what a great honor was conferred upon them in the first knowledge brought to them of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. This "*honor*" has been so widely dispensed that many forget that it is a special honor, a special favor, just as they forget to recognize as special blessings the sunshine and the rain. But this "honor" is not yet as common as some other of God's blessings. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on

the just and on the unjust," throughout the whole world: but not so the gospel [R2377 : page 318] sunlight and the spiritual showers. These blessings have been general only in certain quarters.

"THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD IS JESUS."

When Christ as the "Great Light" arose in Palestine, and when on the day of Pentecost the Church was illuminated by him, as a light for the world, – that light was not sent Southward into the darkness of Africa: the Africans were not "honored" with having the gospel of Christ. Neither was it sent Eastward through India to its hundreds of millions: India was not "honored" with the gospel of Christ. Neither was it sent still farther East to the hundreds of millions of China: China was not "honored" with the gospel of Christ. But it was sent Northward and Westward through and to Europe and America. These lands were "honored," these peoples "have seen a great light," and with that light have received a great blessing. But how comparatively *few* have really seen this light, even when it shone around them on every hand. Alas! like the partly cured blind man of old they see a brightness and can discern something, but see nothing clearly. The Apostle explains their case, saying, "The god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not." – 2 Cor. 4:4.

Having followed the Apostle's reasoning, we are enabled to see clearly each step of divine providence taken in connection with the divine purpose and foreordination.

(1) We see that first of all, to a certain extent, God was "*for*" us, *for* the people of Europe and North America: he was for them or *favorable* to them to the extent of "honoring" or favoring them with the light of grace "as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, our Lord."

(2) In a still fuller sense God was "*for*" or favorable towards those who accept the light of truth, those who through repentance and faith in the precious blood are "justified" from sin, through his grace.

(3) He was yet more "*for*" these justified ones, to the extent that he "called" them, – to suffer with Christ during this Gospel age, and by and by to share his glory.

(4) In a still fuller sense he is "*for*" all those who accept the call and who are seeking to "make their calling and election sure." God is in an especial sense "*for*" all these who are so running as to obtain the prize which he offers. "They shall be *mine*, in that day when I make up *my jewels*."

It is to this called and faithfully running class that the Apostle speaks as "us." He and those whom he addressed ("called to be saints" – Rom. 1:6,7) had first been "honored" with the light; second, they, by repentance and faith, had accepted it and been justified; third, they had been "called;" fourth, they had accepted the calling and given themselves wholly to the Lord. And with the Apostle and the early Church all who to-day can recognize themselves in this same position, as having taken these same steps, may properly apply to themselves the Apostle's words and say, God is *for us*. Who can be against us!

All the "saints" throughout the whole world, who have taken the afore-mentioned steps, are probably altogether not a great multitude; but rather, comparatively, a "little flock:" yet each one of these may say to himself, and realize to the very bottom of his heart as applicable to himself, these wonderful words, – God is *for us*. He may endeavor to grasp the significance of these words, but he will surely fail of getting all of their wonderful meaning. It is not possible for the human mind to grasp the riches of divine grace and love and power. We cannot comprehend them, we can merely apprehend them. If God be *for us*, with all of his infinite wisdom and power, it implies also that Christ is for us, for he is one with the Father; it implies also that all the angels, Cherubim and Seraphim, and all the heavenly powers of our knowledge and beyond our knowledge are *for us*; – all enlisted upon our side, to do us good, to help us, to succor us in time of need,

to uphold us in time of temptation, to strengthen us to do the Father's will. "All things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

The view granted to Elisha's servant, of countless horses, chariots and horsemen of fire or like fire, was of course merely a *vision*, nevertheless it represented a truth, – that divine power is round about God's people on every hand for their protection and their deliverance. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that are his and delivereth them." "Are they [the angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14.) Our Lord expressed the same thing, saying, of his faithful followers: "Their angels [messengers] do always behold the face of my Father." It matters not whether we shall understand this to signify that spirit beings continually surround those called to be the "elect" of the Lord, to guide and shape their interests for their highest good, or whether we shall understand it to be merely a figure of speech, signifying that divine power surrounds God's people; for the results would be the same, it matters not by which means the Lord would deliver them from the evil and help them in trial and adversity. The fact that God is "*for us,*" and that he is making all things to work together for good to those who love him, is the central thought, the essence, the strength of this message to "us."

How wonderful is all this! Let us cast our minds [R2377 : page 319] for a moment over the world with its fifteen hundred millions of inhabitants. Let us remember that they [R2378 : page 319] are all under the "curse," under the sentence of divine displeasure, except the few who have heard of the redemption – of the Way, the Truth and the Life – and who have by faith and obedience "escaped the condemnation that is on the world" and come back into harmony with the Father and into fellowship with his Son. Let us imagine, if we can, this "little flock" of the "honored," "justified" and "called," heaven-led and heaven-blessed, scattered here and there amongst the fifteen hundred million fellow-creatures. O, what joy, what comfort, what peace, what strength the thought must bring to each one who can

realize that he has taken all of these steps thus far, and that he is still pressing along the same line "for the mark of the prize of our high calling!" And this joy is not dimmed, but is greatly enhanced, by the thought that soon, in conformity with God's gracious foreordination, all the "elect" may have a share in the great work of blessing, with the knowledge of the True Light, the masses who are yet in darkness, "without God and having no hope" in him. For altho a redemption has been provided for all, the knowledge of God's grace has not yet reached any but the favored or "honored" minority.

As the Apostle declares in this very same chapter (Rom. 8:22), it is indeed a groaning creation; it has been groaning ever since the sentence of divine wrath was expressed in Eden, and it must continue to groan until the great Deliverer shall have established his Kingdom, and shall have rolled back the "curse" of death and depravity. Oh, what riches of grace have come to "*us*" through Jesus Christ, our Lord! And yet, as the Apostle says, altho we have all this blessing and favor, we have also with it certain trials, difficulties and painful experiences, which the Father sees necessary for our development in order that we may come up to the terms of his predestination, "copies of his Son." And in consequence of this, as the Apostle declares, "We ourselves also [as well as the whole creation] groan within ourselves [while suffering *with* the world we suppress the groan, – "We lay our burdens at his feet and bear a song away"] waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" – "the body of Christ," the elect Church.

The word *if* in this text does not signify a doubt or question on the subject; but quite the reverse. The Apostle has given the evidence that God is for "*us*," in the preceding verses, and now uses *if* as tho he said, – If I have proved that God is for us, then who can be against us!

"WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?"

Who can be against us, if God is for us? The Apostle does not mean that, having God on our side, none would dare to oppose our

way. Quite to the contrary, we have bitter enemies and relentless foes. Who are against us? – Their name is legion. The devil is against us, as the Apostle declares, Our adversary, the devil, goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The same Apostle assures us that we must contend against "the wiles of the devil." Our Lord declares that we must "resist the devil." The Apostle informs us that Satan is cunning and deceitful, as well as desperately wicked; and says that therefore we must have a battle, and as good soldiers we must have on the armor of God, and use it faithfully. Thus we are to resist the devil, and he will flee from us. We are to "quench all the fiery darts of the adversary" in open attacks, and yet to remember that we battle not with flesh and blood, but with a demon host; with "principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places." – Eph. 6:12.

Nor is this all: we have a great enemy in ourselves; – the "carnal mind," "the old man," *reckoned* dead, which must be kept in subjection. Perhaps the greatest battles and the greatest trials, which we are called upon as "new creatures" to endure, are these battles of the new self, the mind of Christ, against the old fallen self, the mind of the flesh.

Furthermore: we have the "world" as "children of darkness" arrayed in opposition to us. They love the darkness and consequently hate not only the light, but also the "children of the light." This our Master declared, saying, "Ye are not of the world, for I have chosen you out of the world." "Marvel not if the world hate you; you know it hated me before it hated you." "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but now ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you." And the world's hatred is not conducted along honorable lines of warfare. It would be ashamed to declare that it loved darkness, and ashamed to declare that it hated us because of the light. Its policy, rather, guided by the great adversary, is, to "put light for darkness, and darkness for light:" to misrepresent our best efforts to be evil and selfish, and to misrepresent its own selfish efforts as being

honorable and good. "Marvel not, if the world hate you." "The darkness hateth the light."

Nor are these great adversaries the only ones to oppose us: we must expect to endure from still another quarter. As our Lord declared, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household." Those whom you have dearly loved of your own family circle, and with whom you have had Christian fellowship, may turn against you and hate you for the truth's sake. Nor will this always be because of wickedness of intention: sometimes at least the persecutions will come conscientiously; as for instance, Saul of Tarsus (who afterward [R2378 : page 320] became the great Apostle Paul) was once a persecutor of "this way," and ignorantly did many things against Jesus and those who loved him. He himself tells us that he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly, thinking that he did God service. And so doubtless it has been with much of the persecution that has come to the Lord's faithful ones in every age. Much of it has been inflicted conscientiously. It is quite remarkable, too, how the Adversary succeeds sometimes in deceiving those, who once knew better, into thinking that anger, malice, hatred, strife, bitter words and slander ("works of the flesh and the devil") are "*duty*." Alas, how blinding is the spirit of the Adversary!

All these adversaries must be resisted, unto blood, unto death, if need be, – must not be permitted to hinder our walking in the footsteps of him who set us an example, – must not be permitted to prevent us from becoming copies of our Lord and thus making our calling and election sure. But while resisting them with all our might, we must avoid carnal weapons and not render railing for railing; rather, so far as possible, we should use the sword of the spirit, the Word of God, and Michael-like say, "The Lord rebuke thee." God is "*for us*," and declares that in his due time he will right present wrongs and falsehoods, saying, "Vengeance is mine, I will render recompences." Indeed, toward the class who war against us ignorantly and conscientiously we should feel no bitterness, but rather sympathy, love

and an earnest desire and effort for an opening of the eyes of their understanding.

The Apostle was not ignoring all of these great adversaries which, like "roaring lions," would terrify us, and if possible arrest our progress in the path of consecration and sacrifice, which leads on to glory. This is not his thought when he says, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Quite to the contrary, his thought is, that *notwithstanding* all these things which are against us, we may realize that God is *for us*, that he has predestinated a Church in glory and has justified and called us to be members of it, and brought us on the journey thus far, through all of these various steps. And if we can realize that God has thus been leading us up to the present time, to bring us to share his glory, and that all things thus far have been working for our good, this is our assurance that *all* wisdom, power and love shall be exerted on our behalf down to the very end of the racecourse, if we continue to abide in Christ, faithfully.

What shall we fear? What could oppose our way so as to hinder it, if God be on our side? This reminds us of the adage, "God with one is a majority." So, God with us, and for us, and leading us, makes us mighty indeed, stronger than all these adversaries with all their arts and wiles and perversity, and able through his grace to come off conquerors, yea, more than conquerors through him who loved us and bought us with his own precious blood.

We urge that each reader mark the various steps of progress through which divine grace has already led him, and that, whatever he finds to be his present standpoint, he go on as the Lord leads, – not content with anything short of "the whole counsel of God." The reader has been "honored" with a knowledge of the grace of God in Christ: if he has not yet accepted, let him quickly accept this grace by repentance for sin and with faith in the *ransom*. If he has done this and has received the grace of justification, and, as the Apostle expresses it, has "joy and peace through believing," then let him remember that still

there's more to follow, and that the justified are "called." Not called to glory merely, but called to *obedience*, called to present their bodies living sacrifices to God in his service, holy and acceptable through Christ.

Alas! how many who have received the grace of justification stop there: they hear the call to suffer with Christ for the truth's sake, they hear the invitation to stand up for Jesus, in their thoughts and words and deeds, but heed not. They perceive that such a full consecration would necessarily mean not only the giving up of sinful pleasures, but also the giving up of some not sinful, that they might devote their words and thoughts and deeds as far as possible as he did, doing good to others. But of those who hear the call to present themselves, how few obey it, how few surrender themselves to him who bought them with his [R2379 : page 320] own precious blood! Yes, many are called; tho few are chosen. All the justified are called to self-surrender, full obedience, full trust in the Lord and full submission to his will. And of those who do accept the call and who have made the covenant, and who are therefore of the "us" class mentioned by the Apostle, how many become "overcharged with the cares of this life, or the deceitfulness of riches," or the perplexities of poverty, and so fail to obtain the fullness of heart-obedience, and consequently will fail to make their calling and election sure.

We are not now discussing what will be the *fate* of those who fail to be victors and to gain a crown and to sit with Christ in his throne; we are considering, rather, the *privileges* of those who have been "honored" of the Lord and led step by step up to present attainments of knowledge and privilege. We are seeking to bring before our minds at least a faint conception of the wonderful provisions of divine grace, and the full ability of every one so called to make his calling and election sure by laying hold of this grace of God, provided in Christ, by which, to them, all things shall work together for good, because they love God and are the called ones according to his purpose.
