

## CHAPTER VII

ARTICLE VI.—*Of the Grace of God.*—We believe that God, out of His great love for the world, has given His only begotten Son to be the Saviour of sinners, and in the Gospel freely offers His all-sufficient salvation to all men. We believe also that God, in His own good pleasure, gave to His Son a people, an innumerable multitude, chosen in Christ unto holiness, service and salvation.

The characteristic action of love is giving; and the glory of that giving is its freedom. When the giving is on behalf of the needy, it will be commensurate with the need. The need of man is salvation. The gift of grace is the Saviour, the One who, by His relation to God, is alone competent to do for man what man is unable to achieve by his own effort. The history of the redemption of man is the record of God's self-giving; and this giving, on God's part reached its climax in a deed of gift, "so amazing, so divine," that verbal forms can never frame its limitless generosity, only the heart can respond to it by a surrender that includes all that man has and is. Let us make no mistake. The essence of Christianity is not a philosophical conception; it is a deed. God loved; and God gave, the utmost He could give, His only-begotten Son; and in that giving gave Himself, to the uttermost sacrifice of which an infinite Person is capable. Christianity accordingly comes to men, not as a theory or a speculation, but as a living word, "a faithful saying," a message of salvation. When this mes-

sage is fully proclaimed, the meaning of Christ is set forth, and the power of Christ is active, and the salvation wrought by Christ is put within the reach of those who need it. The preacher has a far higher office than that of a lecturer on theology, philosophy, ethics, or science. He is the messenger, through whom the offer of the Gospel is made to human beings, freely and in all its fulness. Two things exactly correspond—our own exceeding need, and God's exceeding love. They meet in Christ, and nowhere else. Therefore, the one, all-comprehensive business of the preacher is to "preach Christ," and to convey to sinful men the salvation, whose source is God, whose mediator is Jesus Christ, whose application to the soul is by the Word and the Spirit of God, whose efficiency and sufficiency are perfect and complete. At this point, there rises to our view a patent and lamentable fact; and with the fact comes a problem which has given rise to a devastating controversy. The Christian salvation is all-sufficient and is offered, honestly and freely, to all men; but the grievous truth has to be faced—those for whom it is intended do not all receive it. Only some do. How does this come about? Ask the believer how he came to believe. He will reply that it was through the grace of God assisting him. What, then, of those who do not believe? Was that assisting grace denied them? Some theologians have dared to say that God passed over certain souls, and withheld from them the power that would have enabled them to believe. Such theologians



urge that this is a great mystery, and very terrible to contemplate (*Horribile decretum, fateor*, says Calvin), but an inevitable inference from the sovereignty of God. Not to draw this inference is said to reflect upon the glory of God, and to be worthy of severe penalty at the bar of human justice. The article before us deals with the fact that some do believe, and some do not, in the only way open to a Church seeking to confess its faith, viz., to state the contents of that faith as they are warranted by Christian experience, and by the sacred Scripture. The bestowal of grace is part of the blessed experience of the believer, and ought to enter into his humble, God-glorifying confession of faith. The withholding of that grace from a fellow sinner, no more sinful than himself, cannot be a fact of the believer's experience, and ought not to enter into his confession. He may draw it as an inference from a dogma; but he ought not to make it an article of faith and force it on others, under threat of penalty. Our article, accordingly, deals exclusively with believers, who have received the great salvation, and are living in the possession and enjoyment of it. It lays aside, as not coming within the scope or function of a creed, the rejection of the offered salvation on the part of those who have refused what was freely and in good faith offered to them. What, then, are we warranted and called to affirm regarding believers? (a) They constitute "a people, an innumerable multitude." It is one of the deepest convictions of the New Testament

Christians that the fellowship of believers, including all who then were "in Christ," and all who should ever enter into that blessed relationship to God through Christ, constitute the true Israel, the true people of God, a spiritual organism composed of a "great multitude whom no man can number," but a true community, in which all who belong to it are members in the Body of Christ and are members of one another. This community, like Israel of old, is called into being by the redeeming action of God, and is the subject of His gracious dealing in history, till the course of time is merged in eternal blessedness. (b) This great company of the redeemed, of every age, and race, and clime is the Father's gift to the Son of His love, who, as the Servant of the Lord, fulfilled the redeeming purpose of God at a cost for which there is no computation. This great salvation, applied to an innumerable host of believing souls, is the joy of Jesus, the joy that was set before Him, the joy of an accepted sacrifice. Let not the Church as a whole imagine that it is somehow conferring honor on the Redeemer by its worship. Let not the individual vainly conceive that he pays Jesus a compliment by believing in Him. The whole company of believers, together with every individual believer, forms that gift, or that reward, which God prepared and conferred on Him who, in His redeeming work, became "obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." All whom the Father gives, most surely come to Him who is the Son of the Father. The enthroned Redeemer will in no wise



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cast them out. He will receive them as the Father's precious gift. He will rest in His love, and joy over them with singing. (c) This company is not thus dealt with by God, for its own honor or glory. The individual believer has not been made the subject of God's gracious dealing in Christ, with a view to any selfish satisfaction of his own. "Election," or "choice," is to be interpreted through love, and is to be deprived, in a believer's estimate of his own state of grace, of all taint of selfishness. In the Church as a whole, and in each believer, we see an ulterior end, which the sovereign love of God has in view. That end is described in the article as threefold. (1) Holiness. The divine love is holy; and where love does its saving work holiness must characterize the issue. The believer, in acknowledging the redeeming grace of God and receiving the free offer of the Gospel, becomes pledged to holiness as the goal of all his moral endeavor. The Church, if it is to vindicate its right to be known as the Body of Christ, must make holiness an essential part of its witness to the world and of its constant training of its members. Election, divorced from holiness, would be a moral horror. (2) Service. The believer, who is the subject of God's love in Christ, is also, as such, its organ and instrument. Redeemed by Christ, he is Christ's "slave," committed to a service, which knows no limit, whose motive is the constraining love of Christ, whose field of action is not less than the race of mankind, of which Jesus Christ is Saviour and

Lord. Such service is not a generous behavior, on which we might plume ourselves, and for which God might be conceived as being grateful. It is our bounden duty, a line of action incumbent on those who have been redeemed at infinite cost. A Christian who is not Christ's "joyous slave" is a contradiction in terms, and an ethical monstrosity. (3) Salvation. The purpose of God toward all who are in Christ is salvation, as a present fact, as a continuous process, and as an ultimate consummation. The New Testament usage describes salvation in each of these aspects. *We are saved*, who have given ourselves to Jesus. *We are being saved*, through the keeping of grace of God. *We shall be saved*, when the end of time and space is come, when judgment is set, and the eternal world has begun. Salvation, in its fullest sense, is the purpose of God, and is at once the possession and the expectation of all who have been "chosen in Christ." Salvation rests only on the bed rock of the Divine purpose, "all other ground is sinking sand." Because underlying our faith, there is the will of God, we can go forward, not trusting in our faith, but in the holy and loving will, which has wrought in us this state of grace wherein we stand. Let it be well understood, that the doctrine of Election is for believers only. It ought not to be permitted to rise as a spectre before the exercised but as yet undecided soul. The question for such an one is not "Am I elected"? That would be an outrageous intrusion into the eternal counsels of God. The

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only proper question is: "Do you now own Christ as Saviour, and Lord?—Do you now give yourself utterly and for ever to Him?" That question you must answer for yourself. It is your responsibility. But when you have answered it, in the affirmative, you are permitted and enjoined to believe, that you have become a member of the Body of Christ, that you are in Him, and, as being so, are the object of God's redeeming purpose which cannot fail in time or in eternity. Election is not the door by which we enter. But having entered, we find it the rock on which we stand.