

## Landmarks and Stumblingblocks

### - The Doctrine of Election Misplaced.

C. H. Mackintosh.

"Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old have set in thine inheritance" (Deut. 19: 14).

"Take up the stumblingblock out of the way of My people" (Isa. 57: 14).

What tender care, what gracious considerateness, breathe in the above passages! The ancient landmarks were not to be removed; but the stumblingblocks were to be taken up. The inheritance of God's people was to stand entire and unchanged, while the stumblingblocks were to be sedulously removed out of their pathway. Such was the grace and care of God for His people! The portion which God had given to each was to be enjoyed, while, at the same time, the path in which each was called to walk should be kept free from every occasion of stumbling.

Now, judging from recent communications, we believe we are called upon to give attention to the spirit of those ancient enactments. Some of our friends have, in their letters to us, opened the minds very freely as to their spiritual condition. They have told us of their doubts and fears, their difficulties and dangers, their conflicts and exercises. We are truly grateful for such confidence; and it is our earnest desire to be used of God to help our readers by pointing out the landmarks which He, by His Spirit, has set up, and thus remove the stumblingblocks which the enemy diligently flings in their path.

In pondering the cases which have lately been submitted to us, we have found some in which the enemy was manifestly using as a stumblingblock the doctrine of election *misplaced*. The doctrine of election, in its right place, instead of being a stumblingblock in the pathway of anxious inquirers, will be found to be a landmark set by them of old time, even by the inspired apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the inheritance of God's spiritual Israel.

But we all know that *misplaced* truth is more dangerous than positive error. If a man were to stand up, and boldly declare that the doctrine of election is false, we should without hesitation reject his words; but we might not be quite so well prepared to meet one who, while admitting the doctrine to be true and important, puts it out of its divinely appointed place. This latter is the very thing which is so constantly done, to the damaging of the truth of God, and the darkening of the souls of men.

What, then, is the true place of the doctrine of election? Its true, its divinely appointed place, is for those within the house — for the establishment of true *believers*. Instead of this, the enemy puts it *outside* the house, for the stumbling of anxious *inquirers*. Harken to the following language of a deeply exercised soul: "If I only knew that I was one of the elect I should be quite happy, inasmuch as I could then confidently apply to myself the benefits of the death of Christ."

Doubtless, this would be the language of many, were they only to tell out the feelings of their hearts. They are making a wrong use of the doctrine of election — a doctrine blessedly true in itself — a most valuable "landmark," but made a "stumblingblock" by the enemy. It is very needful for the anxious inquirer to bear in mind that it is *as a lost sinner*, and not as "one of the elect," that he can apply to himself the benefits of the death of Christ.

The proper stand-point from which to get a saving view of the death of Christ is not election, but *the consciousness of our ruin*. This is an unspeakable mercy, inasmuch as I *know I* am a lost sinner; but

I do *not* know that I am one of the elect, until I have received, through the Spirit's testimony and teaching, the glad tidings of salvation through the blood of the Lamb. Salvation — free as the sunbeams, full as the ocean, permanent as the throne of the eternal God — *is preached* to me, *not* as one of the elect, but as one *utterly lost*, guilty, and undone; and when I have received this salvation there is conclusive evidence of my election.

"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God; for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1: 4-5). Election is not my warrant for accepting salvation; but the reception of salvation is the proof of election. For how is any sinner to know that he is one of the elect? Where is he to find it? It must be a matter of divine revelation, else it cannot be a matter of faith. But where is it revealed? Where is the knowledge of election made an indispensable prerequisite, an essential preliminary, to the acceptance of salvation? Nowhere, in the Word of God. My only title to salvation is, that I am a poor guilty, hell-deserving sinner. If I wait for any other title, I am only removing a most valuable landmark from its proper place, and putting it as a stumblingblock in my way. This, to say the least of it, is very unwise.

But it is more than unwise. It is positive opposition to the Word of God; not only to the quotations which stand at the head of this paper, but to the spirit and teaching of the entire volume. Harken to the risen Saviour's commission to His first heralds: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to *every* creature" (Mark 16: 15). Is there so much as a single point, in these words, on which to base a question about election? Is any one, to whom this glorious gospel is preached, called to settle a prior question about his election? Assuredly not.

"All the world" and "every creature" are expressions which set aside every difficulty, and render salvation as free as the air, and as wide as the human family. It is not said, "Go ye into a given section of the world, and preach the gospel to a certain number." No; this would not be in keeping with that grace which was to be proclaimed to the wide, wide world. When the law was in question, it was addressed to a certain number, in a given section; but when the gospel was to be proclaimed, its mighty range was to be, "All the world," and its object, "Every creature."

Again, hear what the Holy Ghost saith, by the apostle Paul: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of *all* acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*" (1 Tim. 1: 15). Is there any room here for raising a question as to one's title to salvation? None whatever. If Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and if I am a sinner, then I am entitled to apply to my own soul the benefits of His precious sacrifice. Ere I can possibly exclude myself therefrom I must be something else than a sinner. If it were anywhere declared in Scripture that Christ Jesus came to save only the elect, then clearly I should, in some way or another, prove myself one of that number, ere I could make my own the benefits of His death. But, thanks be to God, there is nothing the least like this in the whole gospel scheme.

"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was *lost*" (Luke 19: 10). And is not that just what I am? Truly so. Well then, is it not from the standpoint of a lost one that I am to look at the death of Christ? Doubtless. And can I not, while contemplating that precious mystery from thence, adopt the language of faith, and say, "He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*"? Yes, as unreservedly and unconditionally as though I were the only sinner on the surface of the globe.

Nothing can be more soothing and tranquillising to the spirit of an anxious inquirer than to mark the way in which salvation is brought to him in the very condition in which he is, and on the very ground which he occupies. There is not so much as a single stumblingblock along the entire path leading to the glorious inheritance of the saints — an inheritance settled by landmarks which neither

men nor devils can ever remove.

The God of all grace has left nothing undone, nothing unsaid, which could possibly give rest, assurance, and perfect satisfaction to the soul. He has set forth the very condition and character of those for whom Christ died, in such terms as to leave no room for any demur or hesitation. Listen to the following glowing words: "For when we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died *for the ungodly*." "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us." "For if, *when we were enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5: 6, 8, 10).

Can anything be plainer or more pointed than these passages? Is there a single term made use of which could possibly raise a question in the heart of any sinner as to his full and undisputed title to the benefits of the death of Christ? Not one. Am I "ungodly?" It was for such Christ died. Am I "a sinner?" It is to such that God commendeth His love. Am I "an enemy?" It is such God reconciles by the death of His Son.

Thus all is made as plain as a sunbeam; and as for the theological stumblingblock caused by misplacing the doctrine of election, it is entirely removed. It is as a sinner I get the benefit of Christ's death. It is as a lost one I get a salvation which is as free as it is permanent, and as permanent as it is free. All I want, in order to apply to myself the value of the blood of Jesus, is to know myself a guilty *sinner*. It would not help me the least in this matter to be told that I am one of the elect, inasmuch as it is not in that character God addresses me in the gospel, but in another character altogether, even as a *lost sinner*.

But then, some may feel disposed to ask, "Do you want to set aside the doctrine of election?" God forbid. We only want to see it in its right place. We want it as a landmark, not as a stumblingblock. We believe the evangelist has no business to *preach* election. Paul never preached election. He *taught* election, but he preached Christ. This makes all the difference. We believe that no one can be a proper evangelist who is, in any wise, hampered by the doctrine of election misplaced. We have seen serious damage done to two classes of people by preaching election instead of preaching Christ. Careless sinners are made more careless still, while anxious souls have had their anxiety intensified.

These, surely, are sad results, and they ought to be sufficient to awaken very serious thoughts in the minds of all who desire to be successful preachers of that free and full salvation which shines in the gospel of Christ, and leaves all who hear it without a shadow of an excuse. The grand business of the evangelist is to set forth, in his preaching, the perfect love of God, the efficacy of the blood of Christ, and the faithful record of the Holy Ghost. His spirit should be entirely untrammelled, and his gospel unclouded. He should preach a present salvation, free to all, and stable as the pillars which support the throne of God. The gospel is the unfolding of the heart of God as expressed in the death of His Son, recorded by the Holy Spirit.

Were this more carefully attended to, there would be more power in replying to the oft-repeated objection of the careless, as well as in hushing the deep anxieties of exercised and burdened souls. The former would have no just ground of objection; the latter, no reason to fear. When persons reject the gospel on the ground of God's eternal decrees, they are rejecting what is *revealed* on the ground of what is *hidden*. What can they possibly know about God's decrees? Just nothing. How then can that which is secret be urged as a reason for rejecting what is revealed? Why refuse what *can* be known, on the ground of what *cannot*? It is obvious that men do not act thus in cases where they wish to believe a matter. Only let a man be willing to believe a thing, and you will not find him anxiously looking for a ground of objection. But alas! men do not want to believe God. They reject His precious testimony

which is as clear as the sun in meridian brightness, and urge, as their plea for so doing, His decrees which are wrapped in impenetrable darkness. What folly! What blindness! What guilt!

And then as to anxious souls who harass themselves with questions about election, we long to show them that it is not in accordance with the divine mind that they should raise any such difficulty. God addresses them in the exact state in which He sees them and in which they can see themselves. He addresses them as *sinner*s, and this is exactly what they are. *There is nothing but salvation for any sinner, the moment he takes his true place as a sinner.* This is simple enough for any simple soul. To raise questions about election is sheer unbelief. It is, in another way, to reject what is revealed on the ground of what is hidden; it is to refuse what I *can* know, on the ground of what I *cannot*.

God has revealed Himself in the face of Jesus Christ, so that we may know Him and trust Him. Moreover, He has made full provision in the atonement of the cross for all our need and all our guilt. Hence, therefore instead of perplexing myself with the question, "Am I one of the elect?" it is my happy privilege to rest in the perfect love of God, the all-sufficiency of Christ, and the faithful record of the Holy Ghost.

We must close, though there are other stumblingblocks which we long to see removed out of the way of God's people, as well as landmarks which are sadly lost sight of.