

A SERIES  
OF  
TRACTS  
ON THE  
DOCTRINES, ORDER, AND POLITY  
OF THE  
✓  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
IN THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.  
EMBRACING  
SEVERAL ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

VOL. III.

PHILADELPHIA :  
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION.

# CONTENTS

OF THE

## THIRD VOLUME.

	Page
I. Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God; by the Rev. President Edwards. . . . .	5
II. The Sin and Danger of neglecting the Saviour. . . . .	21
III. Grace to the Chief of Sinners; by the Rev. B. Grosvenor, D.D.	37
IV. The Federal Character of Adam; by the Rev. Willis Lord.	61
V. Christ Precious to all True Believers; by President Davies.	77
VI. The Bible a Revelation from God; by the Rev. Thomas Scott, D.D. . . . .	97
VII. Conversion of the Earl of Rochester. . . . .	141
VIII. Jesus Christ the only Foundation; by President Davies. The Foundation Stone; by the Rev. Robert Hall, M.A.	169
IX. A Brief Exposition and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Divine Decrees; by the Rev. G. W. Musgrave, D.D.	193
X. An Apology for not joining the Protestant Episcopal Church; by a Presbyterian. . . . .	233
XI. History of a Church in the South; by the Rev. N Hoyt, D.D. . . . .	257
XII. The Immediate Choice; by the Rev. A. Alexander, D.D.	269
XIII. The Parity of the Ministry; by the Rev. C. C. Cuyler, D.D. . . . .	281
XIV. The Refuge of Lies; by the Rev. A. Alexander, D.D.	299
XV. The Sum of Saving Knowledge. . . . .	311
XVI. An Address to the Head of a Family; by the Rev. P. Doddridge, D.D. . . . .	347
XVII. The Evidences of a Gracious State; by the Rev. C. C. Cuyler, D.D. . . . .	371

THE

IMMEDIATE CHOICE.

BY THE

REV. A. ALEXANDER, D.D.

---

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1843, by ALEXANDER  
W. MITCHELL, M. D. in the office of the Clerk of the District Court for the  
Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

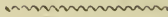
---

PHILADELPHIA :

PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION.

THE

I M M E D I A T E C H O I C E .



Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.

WHEN Joshua was advanced in years, and the time drew near in which he should be gathered to his fathers, he assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, that he might give them his last advice before his departure out of the world. After reciting a brief history of God's dealings with their nation from the time of Abraham to the time then present, he concludes with this solemn exhortation; "Fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth. Put away all false gods, and serve Jehovah." And, "If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, CHOOSE YE THIS DAY WHOM YE WILL SERVE."

The first thing, in these words, which claims our attention is, that Joshua addresses the people as free agents, having power to choose and refuse. If man were not a free agent; if he were compelled to act in despite of his own will; if he were merely a creature of necessity, then all exhortation would be useless—would be mockery. On this subject the sacred Scriptures agree with our own experience. We all have an invincible consciousness of freedom. This knowledge is not acquired from the instruction of others, nor by a process of reasoning, but is self-evident and undeniable. By subtle reasonings men may endeavour to convince us that we are not free, but are mere machines; or that our feelings and character are necessarily produced by the objects around us, and by the circumstances in which we are placed; but even if we should be

unable to unravel their sophistry, we still continue to believe and act as free agents, and we cannot avoid it. No reasonings can be valid which contradict our intuitive perceptions of truth. Men may make out a plausible argument to prove that there is no sun nor moon in the heavens, and neither rock nor tree, nor any thing else, upon earth; but common people will choose to believe their own senses, rather than the conclusions of metaphysical reasoning. Just so every man knows and feels that he is an accountable creature. Those men, therefore, who are carried away with such notions as those with which many in our day are deluded, are wilfully deceived. Because they love not the truth, they are given up to believe a lie. In regard to the great first principles of truth, the unlearned stand on equal ground with the philosopher. These truths are not only level to his capacity, but are as evident to his mind as the shining of the sun at mid-day. It is egregious folly to listen to any arguments which have for their object to disprove any intuitive maxim or principle; because the basis on which all reasoning rests is some first principle intuitively discerned; and, of course, no reasoning founded on such a principle can disprove another truth of which we have the same intuitive certainty. There are some errors, therefore, which we cannot sincerely believe if we would; and that man is not a free, accountable agent, is one of this class. Even they who pretend to believe it are obliged to think and act contrary to their professed opinion every hour of the day. No man can uniformly believe that he is not an accountable agent. When we hear men assert that they are not free, we believe that they contradict the intimate convictions of their own minds: or, if some do truly believe in such absurdities, they are given up to believe a lie.

Philosophers may dispute about the nature of human liberty; but with these disputes common people have very little to do. They know the fact, and that is enough. Few people understand how it is that the food which they eat nourishes them; but their ignorance here does not prevent their digestion. Let all men hold fast what they do know, and not be driven from these safe moorings by the sophistical arts of designing or wicked men, who wish to draw disciples after them.

It cannot be denied, however, that there are several important principles included in the truth, that man is a free, moral agent; as that he is a rational creature, and that he discerns the difference between right and wrong. A per-

fect idiot, or a perfect maniac, is not accountable. He is an agent, and may be called a free agent, but not a moral and accountable agent. A dog, a horse, and an elephant, are agents, and possess a certain degree of liberty; that is, are governed by inclination and will; but they cannot be moral agents, because they have no moral faculty. They discern nothing of the distinction between right and wrong. They have no feeling of moral obligation. A tiger perceives no difference between tearing to pieces a human being, and a lamb or deer. Man, as an accountable being, feels that his actions are his own, that they originate in his own mind.

Men being endowed with freedom, God calls upon them to exercise their choice. He would not have them to serve Him by compulsion, or reluctantly, but will have a willing obedience, or He will accept of none. He requires all men, therefore, to determine whom they will serve. Not that it is a matter of indifference whether men serve God or not, for their salvation depends upon it: but He would have men to make their own election, and abide the consequences.

In the case before us, Joshua, an inspired man, proposes to the Israelites to make their choice between the service of Jehovah and of idols. Much in the same manner, some hundreds of years afterwards, Elijah urged the assembled tribes of Israel to come to a decision whom they would serve. "How long," said he, "halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." (1 Kings xviii. 21.) Owing to the blessed influence of Christianity, gross idolatry is not known among us; at least among Protestant Christians. But the nature of man is not changed. He is still, by nature, alienated from God, and delights not in his service; but makes to himself idols, by setting his affections supremely on the world, loving the creature more than the Creator, who is God blessed forevermore. The apostle Paul declares, that "covetousness is idolatry." And whether we can substantiate the charge of idolatry against men or not, it matters little; for by nature they are still "children of wrath" as really as their forefathers. They are now as prone to depart from the living God as ever. They still follow the old trade of "forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns than can hold no water."

The world, in its three potent aspects of wealth, honour, and pleasure, is the object of affection and pursuit to a very

large majority of men. Yet many are in a state of vacillation. They are halting between God and mammon. They are convinced, in judgment and conscience, that the service of Jehovah is the best, and the only service which they are under any moral obligation to observe; but their taste and inclinations lead them another way. They cannot be persuaded to give up the world as their portion—their chief good. They plead, at any rate, for a little delay. They are willing to promise, that hereafter they will devote themselves to the service of God. But God accepts no vows of this kind. Indeed, they are an insult to the divine Majesty. It is as much as to say, “we prefer the pleasures of sin to thy service; but as we cannot be happy without thy favour, we will indulge ourselves for a season in the world, and then, at some late period, we will engage in thy service.” Such a spirit the Lord detests. He says, he would that we should be either hot or cold; for as for the lukewarm, he will spew them out of his mouth. He insists, therefore, on a decided course, and that promptly—“Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.” But when men are called upon to choose, they are permitted to deliberate. A hasty, precipitate decision, is not the thing desired. The Lord Jesus exhorted his hearers, and us, of course, to “count the cost.” Unless this choice is made deliberately, and upon a full view of what is to be lost as well as gained by the course we pursue, our religion will be temporary and unsteady. Christ held out no flattering worldly baits to allure men to become his disciples. So far from this, he makes self-denial and bearing the cross the very first step in following him; and his terms of discipleship are so high, that if any man loves father or mother, wife or children, yea, or his own life, more than him, he cannot be his disciple. Let every man, then, impartially view both sides, and then make his decision. And that you may be aided in coming to a just conclusion, let us consider what we may hope to gain by choosing the world, and then what advantages the choice of God and his service will bring with it.

By choosing the world you will obviously have this advantage, that the objects of your affection and pursuit are visible and near at hand. You will not have to trust to the testimony of others for their existence, nor to wait until you reach another state of being before you can obtain the possessions and have the enjoyment of them.

A second consideration favourable to the pursuit of worldly instead of heavenly objects is, that you will be in

no danger of being singular, which exposes one to ridicule. You will be kept in countenance by a multitude who have the same objects of pursuit : and among these will be found most of the rich and powerful. Even kings, nobles, and men distinguished in the departments of war and of science, will, for the most part, be your companions. This consideration, whatever weight it may have when weighed in the balance of reason, has, in fact, a powerful influence on the minds of many, especially the young. While they find themselves with the multitude, and following the steps of those who are considered the rich and honourable in the world, they feel little inclined to change their course. Even if it could be shown, by the strongest reasons, that this choice is not a wise one, yet as long as the votary of the world is surrounded by the wealthy, the fashionable, and the powerful, he will be little disposed to pay much attention to the voice of sober reason. He will rather laugh at her dictates, or scorn her unwelcome intrusion to disturb his repose. It is hard to stem the stream, but easy to swim with it. He who chooses the world as his portion, escapes the trouble of changing his course ; he has only to glide along the current which bears along with it nearly all around him. This way is not only broad but descending. Besides, the favour and friendship of the world may be expected by those who cast in their lot with its votaries, according to that maxim of our Saviour, " If ye were of the world, the world would love its own." Similarity of sentiments, affections, and pursuits, produces a mutual liking ; and there can be no doubt but that the man devoted to worldly pursuits will be more likely to obtain a share of the honours, emoluments, and rewards, which the world has to bestow, than one of an opposite character. All aspirants, it is true, cannot be satisfied. The world is not wide enough nor rich enough to gratify the desires and wishes of all who are competitors for her good things. And it cannot be denied, that of those who run in this race there are but few successful, while many meet with a sad disappointment. It is remarkable, however, that in the pursuit of the world, the failure of one or many does not discourage others : no, nor are they convinced of the unsatisfactory nature of their pursuits by their own frequent failures. They attribute their want of success to something wrong in the process, and go back and begin again. It is also a thing which ought not to be concealed, that the competitors for worldly honours, power, and wealth, often come



into collision, and jostle one another without exercising much delicacy or reserve. No one is troubled to see a rival cast down to the ground; and when he is down, it will not be surprising if he is trodden in the dust, if he is the least in the way of the more successful competitors. In consequence of these things, it does sometimes happen, that persons who had given up all their prospects in the world to come, for the sake of this present world, are at last disappointed in all their sanguine hopes, and thus lose all prospect of happiness in both worlds. In candour it ought also to be mentioned, that many, for the want of religious principle, have been led to such acts of fraud and injustice, and to such indulgences, as have utterly ruined their prospects of earthly prosperity: so that though it may be true, that the man who makes the world his supreme object of pursuit, may commonly rise higher than the religious man who views it as a subordinate object, yet the latter occupies a much safer condition; and possessing moderate desires, is likely, with less of worldly goods, to enjoy more happiness than the mere man of the world.

In the view of men of earthly desires and tastes, it cannot but appear a great advantage, that they are free from the restraints of religion; which to men of their feelings must be extremely irksome. The servant of God is under a constant restraint in regard to many things, in which worldly men place no small part of their enjoyment. Not only must he avoid scenes of riot and debauchery, but he is required by the rules of religion, and by public opinion, to abstain from attendance on fashionable amusements. To him, the theatre, the ball-room, the billiard and card tables, are prohibited places. Besides, he is expected to be constant in attendance on religious duties, both publicly and privately. Now it cannot be doubted, that you could scarcely devise a more painful penance for a gay devotee of pleasure, or for an avaricious or ambitious man, than to confine him to assemblies where God is worshipped, and religion inculcated. The man who chooses this world as his portion, also escapes all the persecution and obloquy which to this day, more or less, follow those who "will live godly in Christ Jesus." Indeed, we are informed from infallible authority, that through much tribulation Christians must enter the kingdom; and Christ himself says to his disciples "in the world, ye shall have tribulation." Some professors, indeed, endeavour to unite the service of God and the ardent pursuit of the riches, honours and pleasures

of the world together ; but this plan does not succeed well. Such professors are not cordially acknowledged by the true Church of God, and even in the world they are not recognized as devoted servants of God. The common opinion respecting them is, that they are as much in love with the world, as any of its most open devotees ; but that for some sinister purpose they have assumed the profession of religion, which sits very awkwardly upon them. But Christ settled this point long ago, when he said. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon ;" "Ye cannot serve two masters ;" and also, when he made it necessary for every disciple to deny himself, and take up his cross. There is, therefore, no such thing as carrying the world in our hearts, if we are the true servants of God. Christians always commence a religious life by a solemn promise to renounce the world, and all its pomps and vanities.

Having represented as fairly as I could, all the advantages to be enjoyed by choosing this world as our portion, let us now turn the tables, and see what can be said in favour of the service of God, notwithstanding all the sacrifices which the pious are required to make.

And here we might argue from the very nature of the case, that that must be the wisest, the safest and happiest course, which has the approbation of God. It cannot be, that under the government of a just and good God, any other course of life should be attended with more benefits than his service. As he has the power to reward those who obey his will, we may be sure that all such shall, sooner or later, enjoy a rich reward. It is true, that the objects which they seek are not objects of sense, and their rewards are future, yet there is no uncertainty as to the reality of these things. We know that they exist, from the testimony of God himself, who cannot lie. And a true faith obtains a glimpse of the excellence and glory of these spiritual riches. For "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." And while the experience of the most successful votaries of the world, in all ages, has testified that it is an unsatisfying portion, yea, "vanity and vexation of spirit," so that the mind is never brought to a happy repose in its enjoyment, the things which belong to the spiritual world are found, as far as any have had experience, to be fully adequate to the desires of an immortal soul. Though in this dark world, the heavenly pilgrim obtains but an occasional glimpse, and a transient taste of spiritual enjoyments, yet by these he is

assured, that the excellence of these objects is so superlatively great, and the happiness which they afford so exquisite, that one day spent in the house and service of God, is preferable to all the tumultuous joys of sense. There is, also, in the service of God a dignity and moral propriety, which produce in the soul that peace of conscience, which they who neglect their duty to God, never can enjoy. The truly pious also possess the approbation of the wise and good; and what is far better, they have the favour of God. "Blessed is that man whose God is the Lord." Better have our Creator for our friend, than to possess the friendship of all creatures. For a while, he subjects his people to various trials; but it is all for their good. "All things work together for good to them who love God, who are the called according to his purpose." Even their heaviest afflictions are not excepted. These help "to work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And, under the pressure of affliction, they experience divine supports and consolations, of which the men of the world in their afflictions know nothing. And in a dying hour—which none can escape—they are often enabled to triumph over this last enemy. Christ, the good Shepherd, meets them and comforts them while passing this gloomy valley; so that the saints often sing with joy and assured hope, even on a dying bed,

"Jesus can make," &c.

"Choose then this day whom ye will serve."

It has been admitted that the pious have their afflictions, yea, that they have sorrows which are peculiar to themselves, and of which the men of the world have no experience; such as arise from persecution for righteousness sake, and from a constant conflict with the evils which are in the world, and from the remaining corruptions of their own nature, as well as from temptations by which they are assaulted by the adversary of their souls. They also experience, often, much solicitude and fear respecting their own spiritual condition and future prospects. But they have, also, their peculiar pleasures arising from a sense of God's favour, from peace of conscience, from communion with God, and from the hope of everlasting life. And while the irreligious are subject to many afflictions, to guard against which they possess no antidote, nor even any real alleviation, the righteous have comforts mingled with their

sorrows. They possess support under the heaviest calamities, and often enjoy sweet consolation in the inner man, while the outer man is sorely pressed by the weight of adversity. And to them the terror of death is removed. They need fear no evil in their last conflict, for death is a conquered enemy. The sting of death is taken away, and the grave can boast of no victory over them; but through Him that loved them and gave himself for them, they are brought off more than conquerors. Often it is the fact, that the real Christian's seasons of deep affliction are the seasons of his richest spiritual consolations; and that on his death-bed he enjoys more true happiness than he ever did at any period of his health and earthly prosperity. The light of heaven dawns upon his soul, and he enjoys, as it were, a foretaste of the felicity of the blessed. A philosopher was once asked by a rich king, whom he thought to be the happiest of mortals? he answered wisely that no man should be pronounced happy before we saw his end. His reference was to external prosperity; but this may emphatically be said in relation to future happiness. No man, however rich, powerful and successful, can be pronounced happy who has not a good hope in respect to the coming world. Was the rich man mentioned in the Gospel happy, because during a short life he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, when we are assured, that as soon as he died, he lifted up his eyes in torment? If irreligion possessed every advantage for happiness in this world, it would be the height of folly to choose that course, if in the world to come unceasing misery is to be the consequence. One hour's suffering in hell, will obliterate all pleasant recollection of the pleasures of the world. "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Some shield themselves from the force of these considerations, by entertaining doubts of the reality of future punishment. But unless they could demonstrate that there was no heaven or hell, their neglect of the means to secure the one and avoid the other, cannot be excused. We do not mean, however, to argue with infidels in this place. We leave such to their own thoughts. What we aim at is, to bring such as acknowledge the truth of religion, to act wisely and consistently by embracing what they cannot but acknowledge to be the greatest good, and the most reasonable course.

It is true, that men of carnal minds and vitiated taste

cannot relish the pursuits and pleasures of true religion ; and it is certain, that without a divine, efficacious influence from above, they never will choose the good part which has been recommended to them. But it is right to expostulate with them as reasonable and accountable beings ; for their inability does not in the least interfere with their freedom. In the choice of the world they are perfectly free ; and when, by divine grace, any of them choose Christ and his service, they also are entirely free ; for grace, though efficacious, or, if you please, irresistible, does not in the least interfere with human freedom. They are made willing in the day of God's power, and the more gracious influence is experienced, the more willing the soul becomes : and where there is a willing mind there must be liberty ; for what greater freedom can be imagined than to do what we will ?

“Choose ye then *this day* whom ye will serve.” There should be neither hesitation nor delay. Tomorrow, or any future day, may be too late. The day of grace is limited : death will put an end to all overtures of mercy. Be ye, therefore, now reconciled unto God—in Christ's stead I beseech you to be reconciled. Your judgment is already convinced that it is your interest to make choice of God for your portion, of Christ for your Saviour, and of heaven for your home. Conscience is not silent on the occasion. You cannot but feel that it is your duty to serve God ; and the authority of conscience should be regarded at every risk. The goodness of God in blessing you with so many good things, and continuing you so long upon earth to enjoy the offers of mercy and the means of grace, should persuade you, from a sense of gratitude, to give your heart to God. Where are many who began life nearly at the same time with you ? They are gone to render their account to God, whether prepared or unprepared. Had you been cut down as a barren tree, as you might have been, years ago, what would your condition have been ? O let the goodness of God, and his long suffering, lead you to repentance ! You are not urged to make an unworthy or unreasonable choice, but one which is most noble, because the object of it is intrinsically most excellent. You are not required to choose that which will destroy your happiness, but that which is the only source of true happiness in the universe. And though

the object be infinite, it is nevertheless suited to your soul, which craves an infinite good, and cannot be satisfied with that which is finite. Once more, then, I call upon you to make a choice which you will never regret. This day choose the Lord to be your God and Saviour. Amen.

THE END.