

## DISCOURSE

By President George Q. Cannon, at the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Sunday afternoon, April 27th, 1890.

[REPORTED BY ARTHUR WINTER.]

I will read a portion of the 9th chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.

For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;

Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all. God blessed for ever. Amen.

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children; but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.

And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac,

(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

Nay but, O man, who art thou that resistest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endureth with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

In addressing you this afternoon I desire very much to have an interest in your faith and prayers, that my remarks may be prompted and accompanied by the Spirit of God, and that they may be profitable to us. It is our privilege in coming together to be fed with the bread of life. I would not take much pleasure in meeting as we do today, and certainly not in speaking, if I did not partake of the Spirit of God, so that my heart would be made to rejoice in the truth, and I myself be strengthened by that which should be said. I often remark that our spiritual

wants need to be supplied just as much as our physical wants. There are many even among the Latter-day Saints who undergo a species of starvation through neglect in attending meetings and availing themselves of the opportunities which God has given unto us. They do not get that spiritual nourishment which is as necessary to make the man or the woman in Christ Jesus perfect as it is that we should partake of earthly food to sustain our bodies.

This scripture which I have read in your hearing contains some remarkable expressions, and it has been used by many individuals to convey the idea that there is a predestination or foreordination by which some men are elected to be saved and others are predestined to be damned. Even among Latter-day Saints I have heard remarks made to the effect that there was something in this doctrine, and that (although the idea was not fully conveyed) certain individuals were selected to be vessels of wrath, and did not have it in their power to help themselves, but were inevitably destined to receive certain punishment and to take such a course of life as would bring upon themselves this punishment.

Only a few days ago, one of our sisters, in speaking of a young man who had gone astray, seemed to be at a loss to understand why he should have been left to take evil courses. She asked me how it was that the Elders had been led to help that young man, or that child (he was a child at the time)—how they were led to select him to pay his passage and bring him to Zion, and then he be permitted, after he reached here and had grown up, to go to the bad? She wanted to know why God would prompt His servants to do as they did and suffer such results to follow. Of course, the reflection was made that there was something inscrutable about this providence, something that needed explanation; and the inference might be drawn from the inquiries which were made that God, in some manner, had failed to do that which should be done, or to exercise His providence in a way that it should be exercised to compass the salvation of His children, and especially of this young person.

Now, if there is anything that is clear in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as it is revealed to us in these last days, it is this: that every human being born on the earth has given unto him and unto her the utmost latitude in the exercise of his or her agency. We are taught, and it is made exceeding plain in the word of God, that we can exercise our free agency to the fullest extent necessary to make us responsible for our acts, and by its exercise to gain for ourselves glory in the eternal worlds and the reward which God gives unto his faithful children, or, on the other hand, the condemnation and punishment that wickedness inevitably brings upon those who practise it. This is a fundamental principle of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we as His followers should clearly under-

stand it. If we do wrong (and we have it in our power to do wrong) we must be responsible for that. We do it because we elect to do it, and not because we are compelled by some power over which we have no control to commit this wrong. On the other hand, if we do right, it is because we exercise our agency in that direction, and not because there is a power exercised over us which compels us to do right. Those who reach that blissful state that God has promised to the faithful could not enjoy happiness there if they obtained it in any other way than by the exercise of their agency. So with punishment. If men should be punished for acts that they were compelled to commit by a power superior to their own, how unjust would it be to punish them therefor, and how properly they could reproach our Creator for holding them accountable for the commission of deeds in which they had no agency.

There is no such principle as this in the Gospel. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is one of perfect freedom. Every soul has the right to choose whom he will serve, whether God or Baal, and no individual who does that which is wrong can reproach God therefor. Unfavorable circumstances may surround human beings at their birth which may have influence upon their subsequent careers. But our Great Creator in judging His children will make full allowance for these. Man, having his agency, need not, unless he so wishes, become the entire creature of these circumstances. It becomes his duty to contend against that which is evil, and, by the help of God, to overcome evil inclinations and rise above evil surroundings. It is for this purpose that God gives His Holy Spirit unto His children, that under its influence and by its power they may be able to resist evil, to overcome the temptations that may be in their pathway, and to strengthen themselves in the practice of those virtues which He has enjoined upon us as necessary to make us acceptable in His sight.

But the question arises—and it has often arisen in times past—how it is that God should make such expressions as He has concerning Jacob and Esau. By reference to the history we find that before the children were born, in response to the inquiry of Rebecca concerning them, the Lord said to her "the elder shall serve the younger," although they each should become the head of a great nation. And by those who try to prove that some men are predestined to do good and others to do evil it is often remarked "Has not God said that 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated?'" Is not this an evidence that predestination was doing its work in the lives of these twin brothers? Did not Jacob start before his birth with advantages over his brother Esau? And was Esau to be blamed for selling his birthright and losing the favor of God, when God beforehand had declared that that should be the case?" Then again, those who take this view say, "Why, God has said expressly that He raised up Pharaoh